DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 966 CE 054 930

TITLE	Evaluation of the Chapter 30 Program for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Booz Allen and Hamilton, Inc., Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	15 Jun 89
CONTRACT	V101(93)P-1203
NOTE	154p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; Adults; Cost Effectiveness; Databases; *Educational Administration; Educational Finance; Education Work Relationship; Eligibility; Fringe Benefits; Higher Education; Management Information Systems; *Program Evaluation; *Student Financial Aid; Student Recruitment; *Veterans; *Veterans Education
IDENTIFIERS	*G I Bill

ABSTRACT

A study of the administration of the Chapter 30 education and training programs for veterans by the Veterans Administration (VA) was conducted. Data were collected from October 1988 through April 1989 through interviews with 49 program officials; 2 site visits; a mail survey; a telephone survey; a log of inquiry activity; and available information on budget, workload, and other program statistics. Findings showed that the VA's approach to administering the Chapter 30 program was generally appropriate. The VA was most successful in meeting basic program objectives, such as verification of eligibility of veterans, payment of benefits, and monitoring of veterans to ensure they remain eligible. Areas of less effectiveness included the accuracy, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness of benefit processing and the dissemination of Chapter 30 information to veterans. Among the recommendations were the following: development of a management information system; development of an online, interactive facility database; development of an automated database for Chapter 30 circulars and other procedural information; development of easy-to-understand materials for Chapter 30 application and monthly certification; and development of general materials for veterans on Chapter 30 eligibility, application, and information sources. (The report includes 29 exhibits and 3 appendices as follows: regional office survey results; a listing of management and staff interviews by division; and a 17-item bibliography.) (CML)

****

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *

* from the original document. *

****

Contract No. V101(93)P-1203
Task Order No. 2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

ED319966

EVALUATION OF THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

FINAL REPORT

June 15, 1989

BOOZ•ALLEN & HAMILTON Inc.

CE054930

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page Number

Executive Summary ES-1

I. INTRODUCTION I-1

1. The Chapter 30 Program Was Established As A Refinement Of Earlier Educational Assistance Programs I-1

2. Recent Legislative Changes Have Modified Chapter 30 I-8

3. The Methodology Of This Study Was Designed To Evaluate The VA's Administration Of The Chapter 30 Program I-10

4. This Report Is Organized Into Five Chapters I-17

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION II-1

1. VACO Is Responsible For Chapter 30 Management And Information Dissemination Activities II-1

2. The VA's Administration Of The Chapter 30 Program Includes Processing Of Benefits II-5

3. Inquiry Processing Is Carried Out By All 58 VA Regional Offices And VACO II-18

4. Changes To The VA's Administration Of The Chapter 30 Program Are Occurring In Anticipation Of Projected Program Growth II-27

III. EVALUATION FINDINGS III-1

1. While Substantially Effective In Meeting Benefits Processing Objectives, These Objectives Were Not Met In The Most Optimal Way III-1

2. The VA Is Generally Effective In Meeting Its Information Dissemination Objectives III-14

IV. PROCESS ASSESSMENT IV-1

1. The VA's Efforts Regarding Administration Of The Chapter 30 Program Are Focused On Benefits Processing At St. Louis, Missouri IV-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

Page Number

2. Weaknesses In The VA's Administration Of The Chapter 30 Program Result From Lack Of Attention In Three Program Areas IV-5

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS V-1

1. We Believe The Chapter 30 Program Is Generally Being Administered Effectively By The VA V-1

2. We Believe That Several Additional Refinements Need To Be Made To The Chapter 30 Program V-4

3. These Changes Should Be Implemented Prior To Projected Program Expansion V-12

APPENDIX A: Regional Office Survey Results A-1

APPENDIX B: Chapter 30 Program Evaluation Management and Staff Interviews By Division B-1

APPENDIX C: Bibliography C-1

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Exhibit Number		Page Number
I-1	Timeline of the GI Bill of Rights	I-2
I-2	National Distribution of Chapter 30 Trainees (Fall 1988)	I-5
I-3	Eligibility Requirements	I-7
I-4	Chapter 30 Evaluation Criteria	I-12
I-5	Chapter 30 Assessment Areas	I-14
I-6	Evaluation-Assessment Relationship	I-16
II-1	VACO Veterans Benefits Administration Administrative Organization	II-2
II-2	St. Louis Regional Office Organization Chart	II-6
II-3	Chapter 30 Workstation	II-9
II-4	Chapter 30 Original Claims Process (Flowchart)	II-11
II-5	Central Office Written Inquiries (Flowchart)	II-20
II-6	Central Office Telephone Inquiries (Flowchart)	II-23
II-7	Regional Office Written Inquiries (Flowchart)	II-26
II-8	Regional Office Telephone Inquiries (Flowchart)	II-28
II-9	Projected VA Education Program Trainees (FY 1987 - 1994)	II-30
II-10	Chapter 30 Original Applications (1990) Received by the Department of Veterans Affairs, St. Louis, MO Regional Office (August 1987 - January 1989)	II-30

LIST OF EXHIBITS (CONTINUED)

Exhibit Number		Page Number
II-11	Chapter 30 Monthly Certifications Received by the Department of Veterans Affairs, St. Louis, MO Regional Office (August 1987 - January 1989)	II-31
II-12	Projected VA Education Program Adjudication Division Workload Expressed in Full Time Employee Equivalents (FTEE) (FY 1989 - 1994)	II-31
II-13	Cumulative Payments for Chapter 30 Paid to Veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs, St. Louis, MO Regional Office (July 1986 - January 1989)	II-32
II-14	Projected Annual Chapter 30 Basic Benefits Payments to Veterans and Active Duty Trainees (FY 1989 - 1994)	II-32
III-1	Summary of Effectiveness Findings for VA's Chapter 30 Program	III-2
III-2	Benefits Processing Objectives	III-3
III-3	Enrollment Certification Form	III-8
III-4	Chapter 30 Overtime Expenditures at St. Louis RO (FY88-89)	III-13
III-5	Information Dissemination Objectives	III-15
IV-1	VACO Veterans Benefits Administration Administrative Organization	IV-9
V-1	Management Information System Development	V-5
V-2	Development of Reserve Status Monitoring System	V-6
V-3	Summary of Chapter 30 Recommendations	V-13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary presents results from the evaluation of the Department of Veterans Benefits (VA). This management assessment was conducted by Booz, Allen & Hamilton Inc.

1. WE BELIEVE THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM IS BEING ADMINISTERED BY THE VA IN AN EFFECTIVE MANNER

Results of our evaluation show that the VA's current approach to administering the Chapter 30 program is generally appropriate. Study findings show that the VA has been most successful in meeting program objectives essential to the basic functioning of the Chapter 30 program, including verification of the eligibility of veterans who apply for Chapter 30 benefits, the payment of benefits to eligible veterans, and monitoring of veterans to ensure they remain eligible. Areas of less effectiveness include the accuracy, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness of benefit processing and the dissemination of Chapter 30 information to veterans. This second set of objectives is essential to the long-term success of the Chapter 30 program.

Our study team also observed that the VA has made major improvements in their administration of the Chapter 30 program. These improvements include refinement of Chapter 30 program processes and preparation of new initiatives to accommodate projected program growth.

Areas for potential program improvement were also identified during the study. Recommendations to improve future programmatic success were made in three areas:

- Program Management--Recommendations include development of a management information system, improvement in VA-DOD communications, and development of a directory for regional offices that defines VACO Chapter 30 roles and responsibilities.
- Program Operations--Recommendations include development of an on-line, interactive facility database and development of an automated database for Chapter 30 circulars and other procedural information
- Program Materials--Recommendations include development of easy-to-understand materials for Chapter 30 application and monthly certification and development of general materials for veterans on Chapter 30 eligibility, application, and information sources.

These program refinements should be implemented immediately as projected program expansion will increase the impact of current program weaknesses. In addition, these refinements should be implemented in the context of the VBA modernization initiative.

2. OUR EVALUATION IS BASED ON THE VA'S ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM

Booz, Allen's evaluation of the Chapter 30 program had two important scope limitations. First, we were to focus on the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program. Therefore, an assessment of DOD's goals, objectives, and program efforts was not conducted. Second, this study was to examine the VA's prototype optical disk system only as it pertains to the overall effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program.

Comprehensive data collection efforts were conducted for this study. These efforts included:

- Interviews with 49 program officials at VACO and St. Louis
- Two site visits to the benefits processing facility at the St. Louis regional office
- A mail survey of VBA regional office Chapter 30 activities
- A telephone survey to veterans counselors at academic institutions
- A log of inquiry activity at VACO
- Collection of available information on Chapter 30 budget, workload, and other program statistics.

This extensive data collection effort took place during October of 1988 through April of 1989.

I. INTRODUCTION

I. INTRODUCTION

This draft report presents findings and recommendations from Booz, Allen & Hamilton Inc.'s evaluation of the Department of Veteran Affairs' (VA) Chapter 30 program.

This chapter reviews legislation leading to the implementation of the Chapter 30 Program, an overview of the legislative requirements for the program, the evaluation methodology, and the organization of this report.

1. THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM WAS ESTABLISHED AS A REFINEMENT OF EARLIER EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Since 1944, the VA has offered educational assistance programs to veterans and their families. These programs were initially designed to meet the readjustment needs of servicepersons who had been subjected to mandatory enlistment. As voluntary enlistees became a larger part of the military, the educational benefits programs changed in purpose. Instead of focusing primarily on readjustment problems, the new education benefits programs were also intended as an incentive for high quality recruitment. Exhibit I-1 presents a timeline of the VA's educational benefit programs. The following sections present the background to and establishment of the Montgomery GI Bill.

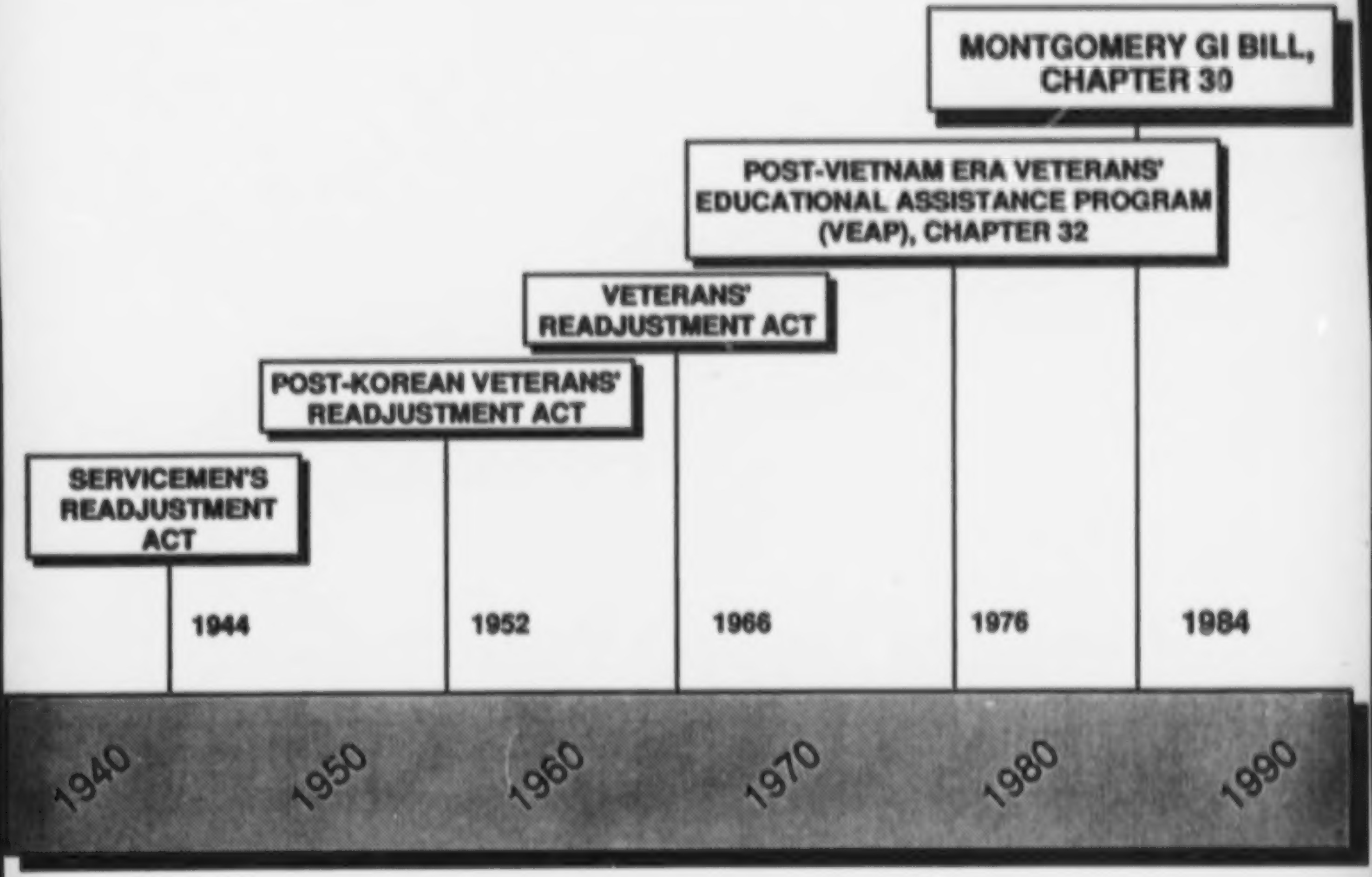
(1) Four Federally-Sponsored Education And Training Programs Provided The Framework For The Montgomery GI Bill

Four federally-sponsored education and training programs offered a wide range of opportunities for returning veterans. The initial program, entitled the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 or the "World War II GI Bill," was enacted as Public Law 346, 78th Congress on June 22, 1944. This act established the course for permanent education programs funded by the government in exchange for military service. This GI Bill was designed to help veterans make a successful transition to civilian life by offering educational and training opportunities which may have been lost while in service. The bill afforded up to four years of higher education, with the government paying for living allowances as well as costs of tuition, books, and fees. Many of the laws and regulations in force today resulted from this GI Bill.

Following the Korean Conflict, a second large group of former military personnel faced readjustment problems. As the World War II GI Bill was perceived as having successfully met veterans' post war needs, another education and training program was legislated

Exhibit I-1

TIMELINE OF THE GI BILL OF RIGHTS


SERVICEMEN'S READJUSTMENT ACT
POST-KOREAN VETERANS' READJUSTMENT ACT
VETERANS' READJUSTMENT ACT
POST-VIETNAM ERA VETERANS' EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (VEAP), CHAPTER 32
MONTGOMERY GI BILL, CHAPTER 30
1944
1952
1966
1976
1984
1940
1950
1960
1970
1980
1990

for servicepersons who served in the Armed Forces during the Korean conflict. On July 16, 1952, the Post-Korean Veteran's Readjustment Act, known as the "Korean Conflict GI Bill," was enacted by Congress to compensate those individuals who were unable to attend school due to military service.

During the "Cold War," following the Korean Conflict, pressure mounted from servicepersons for another education assistance program. This pressure increased following the outbreak of hostilities in Vietnam in 1964. On March 3, 1966, the Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 was enacted. This scaled-down extension of the Korean Conflict GI Bill helped in the readjustment of millions of post-Korean and Vietnam-era veterans by offering educational assistance.

During and after the Vietnam Era, two important social and economic changes occurred in the United States. First, an increasing number of individuals expressed a lack of enthusiasm and respect for the military which resulted in problems with military recruitment and retention. In addition, cost issues became an increasing concern to congressman.

In light of this socioeconomic change, the Chapter 32 Post-Vietnam Era Veterans' Educational Assistance Program, known as the "VEAP Program," was enacted by Congress on October 15, 1976. This bill had two primary purposes. First, it provided benefits to servicepersons in order to aid adjustment to civilian life. In addition, the proponents of this program also recognized that terminating the previous GI Bill without offering an alternative post-service benefit program would impair the military's ability to attract sufficient numbers of quality recruits. In an attempt to resolve these issues, Congress recommended the enactment of a $2-for-$1 contributory-matching program of educational assistance for veterans as part of the VEAP program. However, the VEAP program met with only marginal success as both individual contributions to VEAP accounts and the participation rates after service in the educational and training programs were lower than expected. In addition, recruitment and retention levels of the Armed Forces were declining. Simultaneously, personnel needs of the Armed Forces were changing due to the increasing need for qualified personnel to operate and maintain sophisticated weapon systems. Additionally, the declining number of 18 and 19 year olds led to increased competition from colleges, universities, and private industry for this age group. Consequently, pressure mounted for an improved program of educational benefits for the All-Volunteer Force.

(2) Originally A Test Program, The Montgomery GI Bill Became Permanent In 1987

After two test programs proved unsatisfactory in fulfilling the identified needs, in 1984 Congress enacted Title VII of Public Law 98-525, creating a more expanded, services-wide, three-year test program of education benefits. This program, known as the "New GI Bill," had two primary purposes. First, it was designed to provide readjustment assistance. Secondly, this program was designed to attract and retain high quality individuals in both the active and reserve forces by offering financial assistance to help meet, in part, costs of future education. The active duty service component of the New GI Bill was codified under Chapter 30 of Title 38, U.S.C., while the Selected Reserve service component was codified under Chapter 106 of Title 10, U.S.C.

As a result of this test program, the military recruiting and retention efforts of the Armed Forces improved. Therefore, on June 1, 1987, the "New GI Bill" was made permanent and renamed the Montgomery GI Bill. The active duty component of this program is now referred to as either the Montgomery GI Bill--Active Duty Educational Assistance Program or the Chapter 30 program.

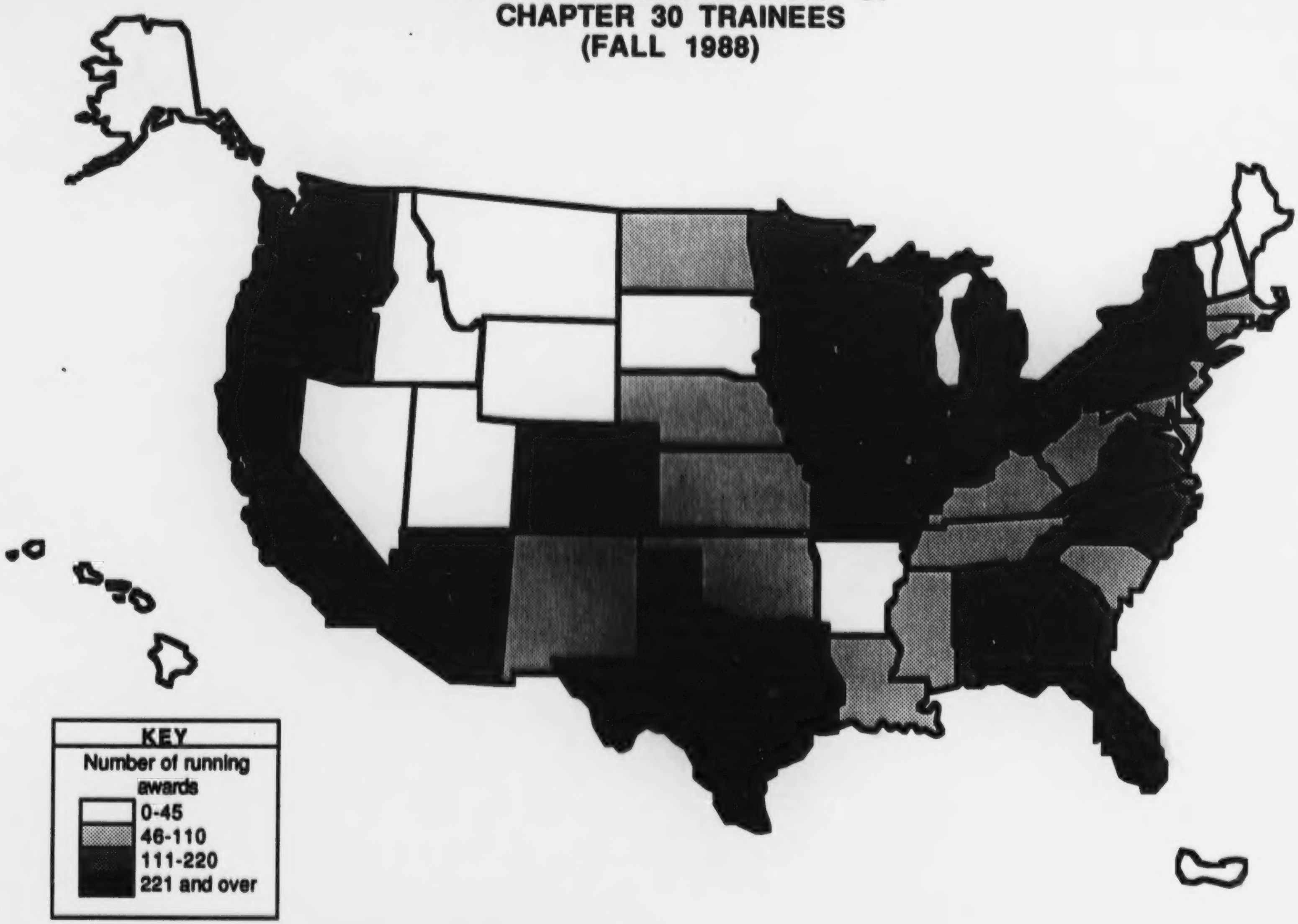
The national distribution of eligible veterans who were receiving Chapter 30 benefits in the fall of 1988 is presented in Exhibit I-2.

The original purposes for the New GI Bill were threefold:

- To provide an educational assistance program to aid in the readjustment of servicepersons to civilian life following separation from military service

- To promote and assist the All-Volunteer Force program and the Total Force Concept of the Armed Forces through the establishment of an educational assistance program, based upon service on active duty and in the Selected Reserve, as an incentive for the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel for the active and reserve elements of the Armed Forces

Exhibit I-2
NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION* OF CHAPTER 30 TRAINEES (FALL 1988)


KEY
Number of running awards
☐ 0-45
▨ 46-110
▩ 111-220
■ 221 and over

Source: COIN EDU 702 Report, Veterans Administration, 1989.
* Average number of monthly Chapter 30 trainees from September - December, 1988.

- To emphasize the provision of educational assistance benefits as an aid in the retention of personnel in the Armed Forces.

Chapter 30 thus established a pay-reduction educational assistance program. To receive benefits, an individual's basic pay is reduced by $100 for each of the first 12 months of military service. This amount is reverted to the Treasury and is non-refundable. The individual's pay then returns to the regular pay amount.

In addition to the monthly educational assistance allowance program, an eligible individual under Chapter 30 can receive monthly benefit increases, known as "kickers," from service branches. Kickers, funded by individual service branches, are offered to enhance recruitment in critical skill areas and increase the length of recruitment.

(3) The Chapter 30 Legislation Established An Educational Assistance Program With Complex Eligibility And Academic Requirements

Currently, according to the Chapter 30 legislation, individuals must meet two types of eligibility requirements in order to receive Chapter 30 benefits:

- Military Service Requirements -- Individuals must have entered the service on or after July 1, 1985; must not have opted out of Chapter 30 Program participation; and, generally, must have served at least two years of continuous active duty and been discharged with an honorable discharge
- Academic Requirements -- Individuals must meet the requirements for a high school diploma or equivalent certificate and they must pursue an approved program of education to attain an educational, professional, or vocational objective for which they are not already qualified by reason of previous education or training.

Each of these requirements is discussed in detail below.

Military Service Requirements

Legislation specifies the basic military service requirements for recipients of Chapter 30 benefits as shown in Exhibit I-3.

Individuals who have served on active duty for two full years are eligible for $250 per month. $300 per month of basic benefits for 36 months of full-time training is available to those individuals who have served on active duty for three years. If an individual serves five additional, consecutive years of active duty, a supplemental educational benefits of up to $300 a month is available to the veteran.

Exhibit I-3
ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

1. Persons entered on active duty after 6/30/85 who have served one of the following:
   - Three consecutive years of active duty when the original obligation was for three years
   - Two consecutive years of active duty when the original obligation was for less than three years
   - Two years active duty followed by a four-year obligation in the Selected Reserve
   - Twenty months active duty of a two year initial obligation due to convenience of government discharge

2. Persons entered on active duty after 6/30/85 who are discharged or released for a service-connected disability, hardship, or reduction in force.

3. Persons who are eligible for Chapter 34 GI Bill benefits as of December 31, 1989 and who have:
   - Served on active duty until 6/30/88
   - Served on active duty until 6/30/87 followed by at least a four year obligation in the Selected Reserve
   - Had no breaks in active duty service after 10/19/84

Those individuals who serve on active duty for two years followed by an additional four years in the Selected Reserve are referred to as "2 by 4" Chapter 30 trainees. These individuals, similar to those serving three-year active duty obligations, are also eligible for $300 per month of basic benefits. Servicepersons must remain in the Selected Reserve for the full four years in order to be eligible for Chapter 30 benefits.

Chapter 30 trainees who, as of December 31, 1989, are eligible for Chapter 34 benefits will receive basic educational assistance allowance plus one-half of the amount they would have received under Chapter 34, but not before January 1, 1990. Entitlement for Chapter 30 educational benefits exists for ten years after leaving active duty service. Extensions are possible if warranted by certain exceptional circumstances.

Academic Requirements

The legislation also specifies academic requirements for Chapter 30 recipients. According to the original legislation, the veteran must have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate prior to enlistment to participate in the Chapter 30 program. After discharge, a veteran can choose any college, university, or training institution to pursue an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctoral degree. Veterans can also enroll in approved vocational, technical, or educational programs, correspondence courses, cooperative training, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. The law was amended to include apprenticeship, other on-the-job training, and correspondence study, although individuals on active duty may not be paid for apprenticeship or on-the-job training. Payment of work-study allowance in addition to payment received for training in schools is now also allowable by law.

The veteran may pursue a program offered by an institution of higher learning (IHL), a non-college degree (NCD) institution, or an on-the-job (OJT) establishment as long as that program is approved by the appropriate State approving agency (SAA). Under the provisions of Chapter 36, Title 38, U.S.C., the SAA is responsible for the approval and supervision of programs of education and training for veterans benefits purposes. Under the provisions of Title 20, U.S.C., the institutions that offer IHL and NCD programs may also be accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. As of December 1988, 92% of all Chapter 30 trainees were enrolled in an IHL. Only 8% of the Chapter 30 trainees were attending an NCD institution.

2. RECENT LEGISLATIVE CHANGES HAVE MODIFIED CHAPTER 30

Several Chapter 30 eligibility changes occurred in Public Law 100-689, The Veterans' Benefits and Programs Improvement Act of 1988, enacted on November 18, 1988. This legislation amended eligibility and entitlement criteria for a broad spectrum of potential Chapter 30 participants. In addition, the election period for agreeing to participate in Chapter 30 has been extended. Three types of changes occurred to the legislation:

- Death benefits are authorized
- Eligibility requirements became less stringent

- Enrollment and withdrawal became more flexible.

These three changes are described in more detail below.

(1) Death Benefits Are Now Authorized By Law For Chapter 30

The law now authorizes a death benefit if death occurs while the person is in the service and the death is service-connected. The death benefit is payable only if the serviceperson was eligible for Chapter 30 benefits at the time of death. No time limit exists for filing for a Chapter 30 death benefit.

(2) Chapter 30 Eligibility Requirements Became Less Stringent

Two basic eligibility requirements were altered by PL 100-689. First, exceptions for veterans who did not complete the required service time were implemented. Second, the high school requirement was made more lenient.

The two types of separations that no longer disqualify veterans for Chapter 30 benefits include:

- A discharge or release for a medical condition which pre-existed enlistment in the service and which the VA determines is not service-connected

- An involuntary discharge or release for convenience of the government due to reduction in force (RIF) as determined by the Secretary of the military department concerned.

The first type of separation for a pre-existing medical condition is characterized by the service department as a medical or disability discharge. To be eligible for Chapter 30 after a RIF separation, the appropriate military department must have determined that the fiscal restraints or major realignment of one or more or the Armed Forces warranted a RIF.

The entitlement computations for these two new reasons to permit early discharges is computed in the same method as those veterans discharged for service-connected disability or hardship.

The requirement for a high school diploma was the second major eligibility change. Individuals no longer need to have received high school diplomas or the equivalent before completion of the qualifying period of Armed Forces Service; only the requirements for a high school diploma or equivalency need to be met by such date. In addition, the veteran can meet the requirements for a high school diploma during the initial obligated service period if she or he entered active duty after July 1, 1985.

(3) Enrollment In The Chapter 30 Program Became More Flexible

The third change to the Chapter 30 program was the creation of an "Open Period" for enrollment. This open period allows individuals to withdraw a previous election not to enroll in the Chapter 30 program. These changes became effective on November 18, 1988.

Servicepersons who initially decline to participate in Chapter 30 may later enroll under certain circumstances as follows:

- Individuals must have first entered the service from July 1, 1985 through June 30, 1988
- Servicepersons must have continuously served on active duty since the entry date of their active duty
- Servicepersons must be serving on active duty during the designated open period - December 1, 1988 through June 30, 1989.

Servicepersons can withdraw their initial election not to enroll in Chapter 30 only while serving on active duty during the open period. These individuals must complete the period of service he or she was obligated to serve at the beginning of the open period.

3. THE METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY WAS DESIGNED TO EVALUATE THE VA'S ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM

Booz, Allen & Hamilton Inc. was requested by the VA to perform a management assessment of the Chapter 30 program. The Booz, Allen evaluation of the Chapter 30 program included three activities:

- Definition of study scope--two limitations were defined
- Development of study methodology--two components, outcome evaluation and process assessment, were developed

- Development of data collection methodology--seven data collection activities were planned.

These three activities are described in more detail below.

(1) The Study Scope Included Two Limitations

Two limitations in study scope were defined for the Booz, Allen evaluation of the Chapter 30 Program:

- The study would examine the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program

- The study would not perform an extensive evaluation of the VA's prototype optical disk system.

While the Department of Defense (DOD) has a large role in the administration of the Chapter 30 Program, the VA requested that this study focus only on the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program. Thus, an assessment of DOD's goals, missions, and objectives were not included.

A separate evaluation of the VA's optical disk prototype system, currently being used for benefits processing of Chapter 30 claims, is currently being conducted. In order to prevent duplication of effort, it was determined that this study would only examine the prototype system as it pertains to overall effectiveness and operation of the Chapter 30 program.

(2) The Purpose Of The Evaluation Component Was To Determine The Effectiveness Of The VA Chapter 30 Program

Evaluation criteria specific to the Chapter 30 program were developed to measure the VA's progress in achieving program objectives. Program objectives specific to the VA's administration of the program were first developed, as shown in Exhibit I-4. The evaluation criteria were divided into two areas: functional effectiveness and operational effectiveness. Functional effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program was determined by the:

- Extent to which the VA Chapter 30 program provides benefits to veterans

- Extent to which the VA Chapter 30 program provides information to veterans and other inquirers.

Exhibit I-4
CHAPTER 30 EVALUATION CRITERIA

EVALUATION CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTIONS
1. Extent to which the VA Chapter 30 program provides benefits to veterans	• Does the VA verify the eligibility of veterans who apply for Chapter 30 benefits? • Does the VA pay benefits to veterans who have been found eligible? • Does the VA monitor veterans who are receiving benefits to ensure they remain eligible?
2. Extent to which the VA Chapter 30 program provides information to veterans and other inquirers	• Does the VA provide information to separatees on their Chapter 30 eligibility? • Does the VA provide information to veterans regarding application for Chapter 30 benefits? • Does the VA provide information to veterans regarding changes in the Chapter 30 program?
3. Timeliness of the VA Chapter 30 program in meeting its intended objectives	• Does the VA provide Chapter 30 benefits to the veterans in a timely fashion? • Does the VA disseminate information on Chapter 30 in a timely fashion?
4. Efficiency of the VA Chapter 30 program in meeting its intended objectives	• Is the cost of providing Chapter 30 benefits consistent with planned costs? • Is the cost of providing information on Chapter 30 consistent with planned costs?
5. Accuracy of Chapter 30 benefits and information provided to veterans	• Are the benefits paid accurately? • Is accurate information disseminated?

Operational effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program was determined by:

- Timeliness of the VA Chapter 30 program in meeting its intended objectives
- Efficiency of the VA Chapter 30 program in meeting its intended objectives
- Accuracy of Chapter 30 benefits and information provided to veterans.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the VA in meeting the above objectives was then conducted to identify problem and success areas. First, evaluation criteria were developed to measure the effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program in meeting its benefits processing and information dissemination objectives. Data were then collected by the study team to measure the effectiveness of VA program operations in meeting these objectives. The study team then rated the level of effectiveness using a five-point scale ranging from "highly effective" (a rating of 5) to "not effective" (a rating of 1). The results of this evaluation are presented in Chapter III.

(3) The Purpose Of The Assessment Component Was To Identify Process Strengths And Weaknesses

In the next study methodology activity, the effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program components were assessed to determine those specific component attributes responsible for the previously identified areas of program strength and weakness. Exhibit I-5 shows the four program components identified for this study. They include:

- Roles and responsibility of the VA
- Expertise of the VA staff
- Tools available for the administration of the Chapter 30 program
- Methodologies and processes used for the administration of the Chapter 30 program.

The results of this process assessment are presented in Chapter IV.

Exhibit I-5
CHAPTER 30 ASSESSMENT AREAS

ASSESSMENT AREAS	ASSESSMENT AREA QUESTIONS
1. Roles and Responsibilities of the VA	• Do all affected VA and other organizations have appropriate levels of input into the program? • Do the veterans (program users) have appropriate input? • Are the responsibilities for the VA Chapter 30 process appropriate and clearly defined? • Does having the benefits processing centralized in St. Louis help or hinder their processing? • Does having the inquiry processing decentralized in all the regional offices and central office help or hinder their processing?
2. Expertise of the VA staff	• Are there adequate education levels attained? • Is there adequate experience attained? • Is there adequate training?
3. Tools available for the administration of the program	• Do the circulars, policies, and procedural manuals provide useful guidance to Chapter 30 staff? • Do the various databases provide accurate and timely information? • Does the software meet the needs of the Chapter 30 program? • Does the hardware meet the needs of the Chapter 30 program? • Is the information on program eligibility and entitlement readily available and useful?
4. Methodologies and processes used for the administration of the Chapter 30 program	• Is the claims processing methodology appropriate? • Is the inquiry processing methodology appropriate? • Are the evaluation methods used appropriate? • Is the monthly certification processing appropriate? • Are the outreach/marketing methodologies used by the Chapter 30 program appropriate? • How accurate are the budget projections? • How accurate are the workload projections?

(4) Conclusions And Recommendations Were Based On The Results From The Evaluation Component And Process Assessment Component

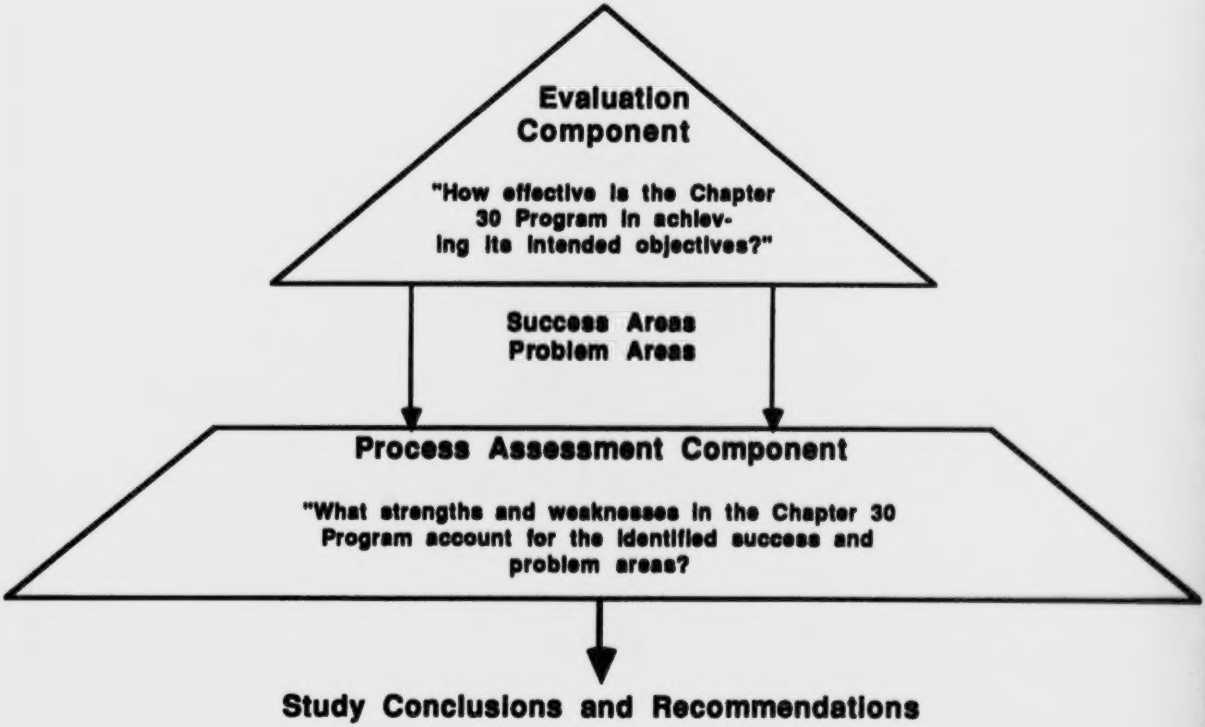
In the final study methodology activity, conclusions were drawn regarding the relationships between program areas of effectiveness and ineffectiveness and process strengths and weaknesses as shown in Exhibit I-6. These conclusions provided the basis for the recommendations to improve program component performance and overall program effectiveness. These conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter V.

(5) Extensive Data Collection Efforts Were Conducted For This Study

Seven types of data collection activities were conducted by the Booz, Allen study team during the evaluation:

- 28 Management interviews were conducted with Chapter 30 program officials at VACO
- 21 Management Interviews were conducted during a site visit to St. Louis
- A tour of the benefits processing facility at St. Louis regional office was completed
- Collection of available quantitative data on the Chapter 30 program was completed including information on caseload and budget projections, weekly, monthly, and annual status reports, and other data
- A survey of all 58 VBA regional offices was completed
- A telephone survey to a sample of veterans' counselors at seven academic institutions was completed
- Inquiry logs were maintained by VACO for a one-month period.

Exhibit I-6
EVALUATION-ASSESSMENT RELATIONSHIP


Evaluation Component
"How effective is the Chapter 30 Program in achieving its intended objectives?"
Success Areas
Problem Areas
Process Assessment Component
"What strengths and weaknesses in the Chapter 30 Program account for the identified success and problem areas?
Study Conclusions and Recommendations

4. THIS REPORT IS ORGANIZED INTO FIVE CHAPTERS

The remainder of this report presents the Chapter 30 evaluation findings, conclusion, and recommendations. The chapters following this chapter include:

- Chapter Two, Program Overview--presents a description of the current VA program
- Chapter Three, Evaluation Findings--discusses the evaluation findings from the outcome evaluation
- Chapter Four--Process Assessment--discusses the strengths and weakness of the Chapter 30 program as identified by the processes assessment
- Chapter Five, Conclusions and Recommendations--presents the conclusions and recommendations for the Chapter 30 program.

In addition, three appendices are included. Appendix A presents the results of the regional office survey. Appendix B lists the VA interviews conducted. Appendix C provides a study bibliography.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This chapter presents an overview of the Chapter 30 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program operations. First, responsibilities of VA Central Office (VACO) for the Chapter 30 program are described. Second, the Chapter 30 benefits processing procedures are reviewed. Third, information dissemination activities are described. Finally, planned changes for the Chapter 30 program are presented.

1. VACO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHAPTER 30 MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Several organizations within VACO are responsible for the administration of the Chapter 30 program. Most notably, the Office of the Secretary makes policy decisions for Chapter 30 as well as the other VA education benefits, while the Office of Budget and Finance allocates the total funds available for the administration and processing of all VA education programs. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has the primary responsibility for Chapter 30 program administration.

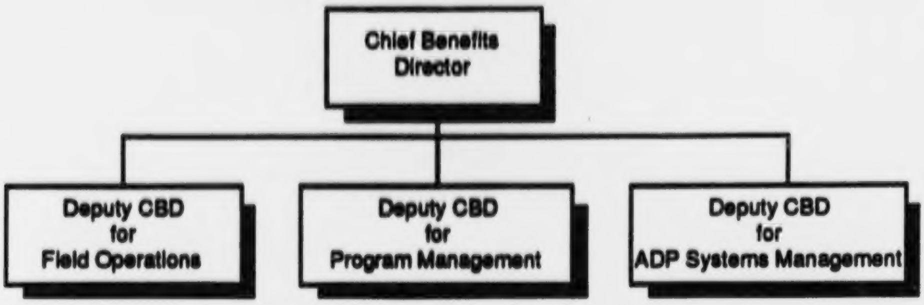
(1) The VBA Has Overall Responsibility For Administration Of Chapter 30

All four divisions within VBA have responsibilities for the Chapter 30 program. These responsibilities are as follows:

- Office of the Chief Benefits Director--overall responsibility for Chapter 30 including assignment of roles and responsibilities
- Office of the Deputy Chief Benefits Director (DCBD) for Field Operations--responsible for ensuring appropriate resources are available for regional office operations
- Office of the DCBD for ADP Systems Management--responsible for computer hardware and software decisions
- Office of the DCBD for Program Management--the four sections within this office have specific responsibilities for the administration of the many aspects of Chapter 30 operations.

Exhibit II-1 illustrates the relationship between the above divisions.

Exhibit II-1
VACO VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION
ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION


Chief Benefits Director
Deputy CBD for Field Operations
Deputy CBD for Program Management
Deputy CBD for ADP Systems Management

Most of the day-to-day responsibility for Chapter 30 is executed by the Office of the DCBD for Program Management. Three sections in this office have Chapter 30 responsibilities as follows:

- Compensation and Pension Service--makes final determination on all rating board decisions including circumstances of veteran's death. In addition, the St. Louis regional office may request ratings.
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Education Service--contains three sections: Education Operations, Education Procedures and Systems, and Education Policy and Program Administration. These sections conduct Chapter 30 field studies, write Chapter 30 circulars, manage Chapter 30 computer systems, and answer Chapter 30 inquiries
- Veterans Assistance Service--develops and distributes VA information packages to veterans and Chapter 30 flyers to schools and regional offices.

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Education Service (VR&E), under the Deputy Chief Benefits Director for Program Management, has the lead for the Chapter 30 policy, procedures, and program administration. In addition to the above responsibilities, the sections within VR&E also help develop the Chapter 30 budget, organize education conferences with school and special interest groups, administer the prototype optical disk system, interpret Chapter 30 legislation, and ensure the accuracy of the information disseminated by regional offices.

Two of these services, Compensation and Pension Service and Veterans Assistance Service, have program authority to staff in the regional offices. C&P Service has program authority over the Adjudication Division while VAS has program authority over Veterans Services Division. VR&E has no comparable organization in the regional office.

(2) VBA Is Responsible For Projecting Workload And Budget Needs

Within VBA, the budget staff for VR&E is responsible for formulating workload projections for Chapter 30. Chapter 30 anticipated workload is based on two factors:

- Related workload trends
- Potential number of education trainees.

The process used to calculate these program statistics is discussed in further detail below.

Workload trends are calculated by the historical frequency of original and adjustment/supplemental claims. As Chapter 30 is a new program, the lack of historical data has been a problem. Chapter 30 anticipated workload for 1989 and 1990 was developed by comparing the VR&E Service workload projections to St. Louis' workload projections St. Louis' projection for each end product (EP) workload was reviewed and compared to VR&E's projection for that same end product workload for the St. Louis regional office. If any discrepancies existed, the following reconciliations were made:

- If the regional office projected a lower number of EPs than VR&E Service, the regional office's anticipated workload was accepted.

- If the regional office projected a higher number of EPs than the VR&E Service, the regional office's methodology was reviewed and analyzed for supporting justification.

- If the regional office's justification and data appeared valid based on historical experience or local economic conditions, the regional office's projections were accepted.

- If the regional office's anticipated workload was marginally higher than the VR&E Service's projection, a projection midway between the two was used.

- If the regional office's justification and data did not appear valid, the VR&E Service's projection was used.

Data on the number of separations from military service are supplied to the VA by the Department of Defense (DOD). These data are used by the VA budget staff to determine yearly trainee numbers. Once the yearly trainee numbers are determined, VA budget staff estimate annual workload trends. These two statistics are then combined to formulate annual workload projections for Chapter 30.

(3) VACO Is Responsible For Centralized Information Dissemination Activities

Information on the Chapter 30 program is disseminated by both the VA and DOD through various media including mailings, public messages, and lectures and seminars. VACO is solely responsible for three handouts which are used to inform their staff and veterans about the Chapter 30 programs. These publications include the Veterans Assistance Discharge System (VADS) package, circulars, and procedural manuals and are discussed in detail below.

VADS is a system used to inform newly discharged veterans of VA benefits. The system uses data received from DOD to locate the veteran. Information is then sent automatically to the veteran. Two mailings to the veteran are done.

The veteran receives the first VADS package approximately 30 days after discharge from the service. This mailing includes the following:

- Veterans Benefits Timetable Chart
- Information Request Card.

The timetable chart, which includes Chapter 30 information, describes the basic benefits and compensations offered to veterans by the VA. The veteran can request more information about a particular benefit with the information request card. For more information on Chapter 30, the veteran can check either the GI Bill Education Assistance box or the Veterans Assistance Representative box. All regional offices receive information cards and send the appropriate information back to the veteran. If additional information on Chapter 30 is requested, the regional office sends a Chapter 30-specific flyer and an application.

The Chapter 30-specific flyer is made available to separatees at the 1700 discharge points through VA distribution to all military services. All regional offices also receive this flyer for distribution to veteran inquiries or walk-ins. The VA will revise the flyer by July 1, 1989 to include the Chapter 30 regionalization plan.

A follow-up letter is sent to each veteran six months after the first mailing. This second mailing is also sent from Austin, Texas through the BIRLS system and includes the cover letter and a pamphlet entitled "A Summary of Veterans Administration Benefits." Chapter 30 benefits and eligibility requirements are explained specifically in the pamphlet on two pages.

The Vocational Rehabilitation And Education Service is currently writing two Chapter 30-specific pamphlets, with the first expected to go to print by December 1989. The quantity of distribution is dependent upon available resources and does not necessarily relate to the number of veterans eligible for Chapter 30 benefits.

VACO is also responsible for publication and distribution of all circulars and manuals. Chapter 30 circulars contain information on legislation and procedures. The Chapter 30-specific circulars take approximately 60 days to prepare and are distributed VA-wide.

Procedural information for benefit processing is contained in VA manuals. Presently, processing guidelines for Chapter 30 have not been incorporated into the manuals.

The VA also provides news releases through the public affairs office. Interviews with this office revealed that no specific Chapter 30 news releases have been prepared to date.

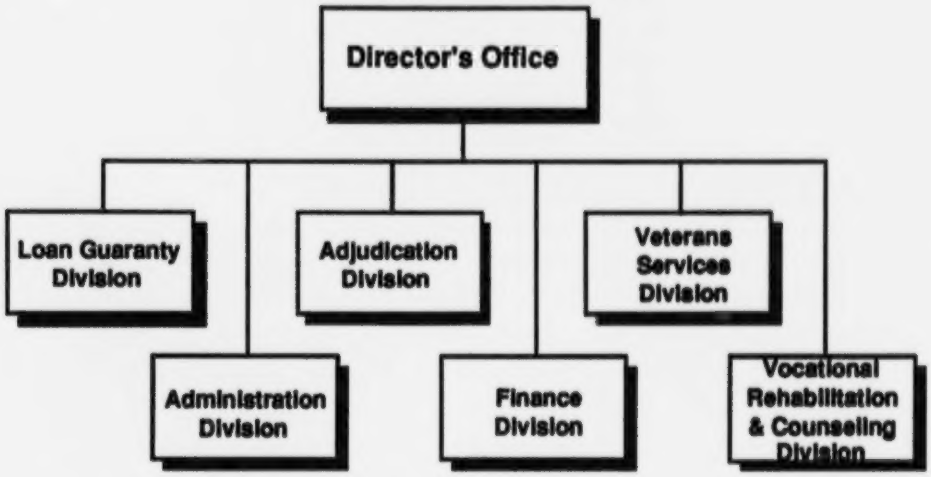
2. THE VA'S ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM INCLUDES PROCESSING OF BENEFITS

This section describes the organization and processes used to administer VBA's Chapter 30 benefits.

(1) Chapter 30 Benefits Processing Is Centralized In St. Louis, Missouri

The VA currently maintains 58 regional offices throughout the United States and Puerto Rico for the purpose of assisting veterans within their jurisdiction. However, all Chapter 30 benefits are administered through one regional office located in St. Louis, MO. The St. Louis regional office consists of the director's office and six divisions. The regional office director, the assistant regional office director, the management analyst, and the office director trainee comprise the personnel in the director's office. The Administration Division, Adjudication Division, Finance Division, the Veterans Services Division, Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling (VR&C) Division, and the Loan Guaranty Division constitute the six divisions. The St. Louis regional office currently has approximately 50 employees. Exhibit II-2 shows the organization of this office.

Exhibit II-2
ST. LOUIS REGIONAL OFFICE
ORGANIZATION CHART


Director's Office
Loan Guaranty Division
Adjudication Division
Veterans Services Division
Administration Division
Finance Division
Vocational Rehabilitation & Counseling Division

Each of the divisions in St. Louis except the Loan Guaranty and VR&C Divisions plays an integral role in the processing of Chapter 30 benefits. Currently, approximately 35 St. Louis staff members are assigned either full or part-time to the Chapter 30 program. This number is continually growing with a rapid increase in Chapter 30 participation. Responsibilities within the St. Louis office for the Chapter 30 program are as follows.

The Director's Office ensures that the staff of Chapter 30 are processing benefits in a timely and accurate manner. The Director is also responsible for planning adequate resources, such as full time employee equivalent (FTEE), space, and equipment, to administer the program. The Management Analyst monitors and analyzes Chapter 30 operating issues and keeps the

Director informed. The Assistant Director provides assistance to the Director as needed to ensure efficient administration of the Chapter 30 program.

The Administration Division is responsible for all incoming and outgoing mail which includes Chapter 30 original application and correspondence. The personnel for this division consists of the Chief Administrative Division, Assistant Division Chief, mail clerk, program clerks, and file clerk. The Division Chief handles concerns relating to the effective processing of the mail. The Assistant Division Chief is responsible for day-to-day operations of the Administration Division. The mail clerk's duties include opening and reviewing incoming mail, delivering folders inter-office, and picking up and stamping outgoing mail. The program clerks batch, scan, index, verify, and commit the mail to optical disk. The file clerk files mail after it has been entered into the optical disk system.

The Adjudication Division is responsible for determining the eligibility of an applicant and making education awards. The Adjudication Officer, Section Chief, Unit Chief, senior claims examiners, claims examiners, and development clerks comprise the personnel for this division. The Adjudication Officer ensures the quality and timeliness of administering Chapter 30 benefits, including training of adjudicators. The Section Chief supervises all Unit Chiefs and handles the every day problem situations. The Chapter 30 Unit Chief manages the daily operations for the Chapter 30 program. He allocates work to the claims examiners as well as handles all administrative action such as performance reviews and training. Approximately eight to ten senior claims examiners and claims examiners are assigned to the Chapter 30 unit. The senior claims examiners, or authorizers, are responsible for validating the award action. They review the application to ensure eligibility and award amount. The claims examiners, or adjudicators, analyze the applications to determine if the veteran is eligible for Chapter 30 education benefits. The adjudicator must review the original application, all service information contained on the DD-214, and acceptability of the chosen academic institution. The development clerk reviews the claims for completeness before routing the application to an adjudicator and, if time permits, he annotates the facility file code.

The Finance Division processes all verifications and certifications of attendance that a veteran must submit to the St. Louis regional office monthly in order to receive his or her benefits. This division is comprised of the Finance Officer, Assistant Finance

Officer, Chief of Centralized Processing, and fiscal accountant clerks. The Finance Officer is in charge of ensuring smooth operation of all finance activities. These activities include accounts receivable, overpayments, and monthly certification form processing. The Assistant Finance Officer is responsible for addressing problems or concerns that arise in processing monthly certification forms or balancing veterans' accounts. The Chief of centralized processing is responsible for the efficient operation of monthly certification forms which includes training for the fiscal accountant clerks. The fiscal accountant clerks process the monthly monthly certification forms and answer written payment inquiries.

The Veterans Service Division is responsible for all written and telephonic inquiries from regional offices, school officials, and in-house staff about Chapter 30. Counseling services to veterans are provided. This division is also responsible for the maintenance of the Facility File that contains approval information of schools, courses, and course hours. The personnel consists of the Veteran Service Officer, the Education Liaison Representative (ELR), the Supervisor of the Telephone Unit, and Veterans Benefits Counselors (VBCs). The Veterans Service Officer ensures that all Chapter 30 inquiries are met with accurate and timely responses. He also handles all administrative duties. The ELR is responsible for maintaining the facility file books that contain the approval information on education institutions, courses, and course hours. The ELR also updates and maintains the facility file database in Target for the adjudicators' use in determining award eligibility. The Veteran Benefits Counselors respond to all inquiries concerning Chapter 30.

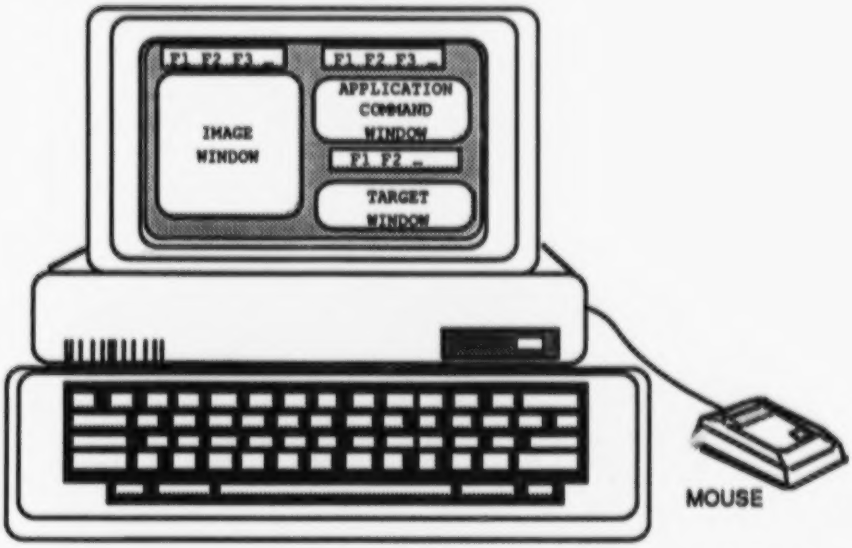
(2) St. Louis Is Currently Using A Prototype Optical Disk System For Benefits Processing

As the result of a 1984 DVB study on VA modernization, optical disk technology was determined the best alternative for replacing the labor-intensive paper filing system used for veterans' claims. As the Chapter 30 program was initiated at the same time as the optical disk recommendation, it was determined that the Chapter 30 program would serve as the prototype for the optical disk. However, while the Chapter 30 paper processing and workload allocation procedures are automated, benefits processing procedures are the same under both the manual and automated filing systems.

The Chapter 30 prototype optical disk system uses a disk-based image technology that operates on FileNet hardware. An electronic image of the document, captured by an optical scanner, provides the data input for the system and is electronically routed to the appropriate division.

To view the document, the VA staffperson retrieves its image on his or her workstation. These workstations contain multiple windows, whereby several functions can be performed simultaneously. For example, a complete picture of the scanned claims application can be viewed at the same time as information from a DOD database containing service information. Exhibit II-3 illustrates the workstation with multiple windows described above.

Exhibit II-3
CHAPTER 30 WORKSTATION



(3) Benefits Are Processed In A Standardized Way

In order for Chapter 30 standardized processing to begin, three forms must be submitted by the veteran. These forms are:

- An original application form
- An enrollment certification form
- A monthly certification form.

To initiate a benefit claim, a veteran must submit an original application for Chapter 30 benefits (Form 22-1990). This document contains background information about the veteran such as name, address, branch of service, and appropriate dates as well as the veteran's educational goals, potential education institution, and course of study.

The second form required for processing a Chapter 30 benefits request is the enrollment certification (Form 22-1999). This form is initially completed by the certifying official of the school or training establishment chosen by the veteran. The veteran's enrollment dates, courses, and course hours are the key data on this form. If this form is not submitted with the original application, an award determination can still be made by the adjudicator. If eligible, the veteran would receive a certificate of eligibility (C of E) which states that the veteran can receive educational assistance once an approved school has been chosen and the 22-1999 submitted to the VA.

Third, if an award has been approved by the VA, the veteran will be sent, on a monthly basis, a monthly certification form (22-8979) that must be completed and returned to the St. Louis regional office in order for the veteran to receive benefits. Under specific conditions, telephonic monthly certification forms are accepted by the VBCs who then forward the information to the Finance Division for processing. This monthly certification process is intended to keep veteran enrollment information current and reduce overpayment of benefits.

Once all the appropriate information is received, three separate steps occur to complete the processing of a Chapter 30 claim. These steps are as follows:

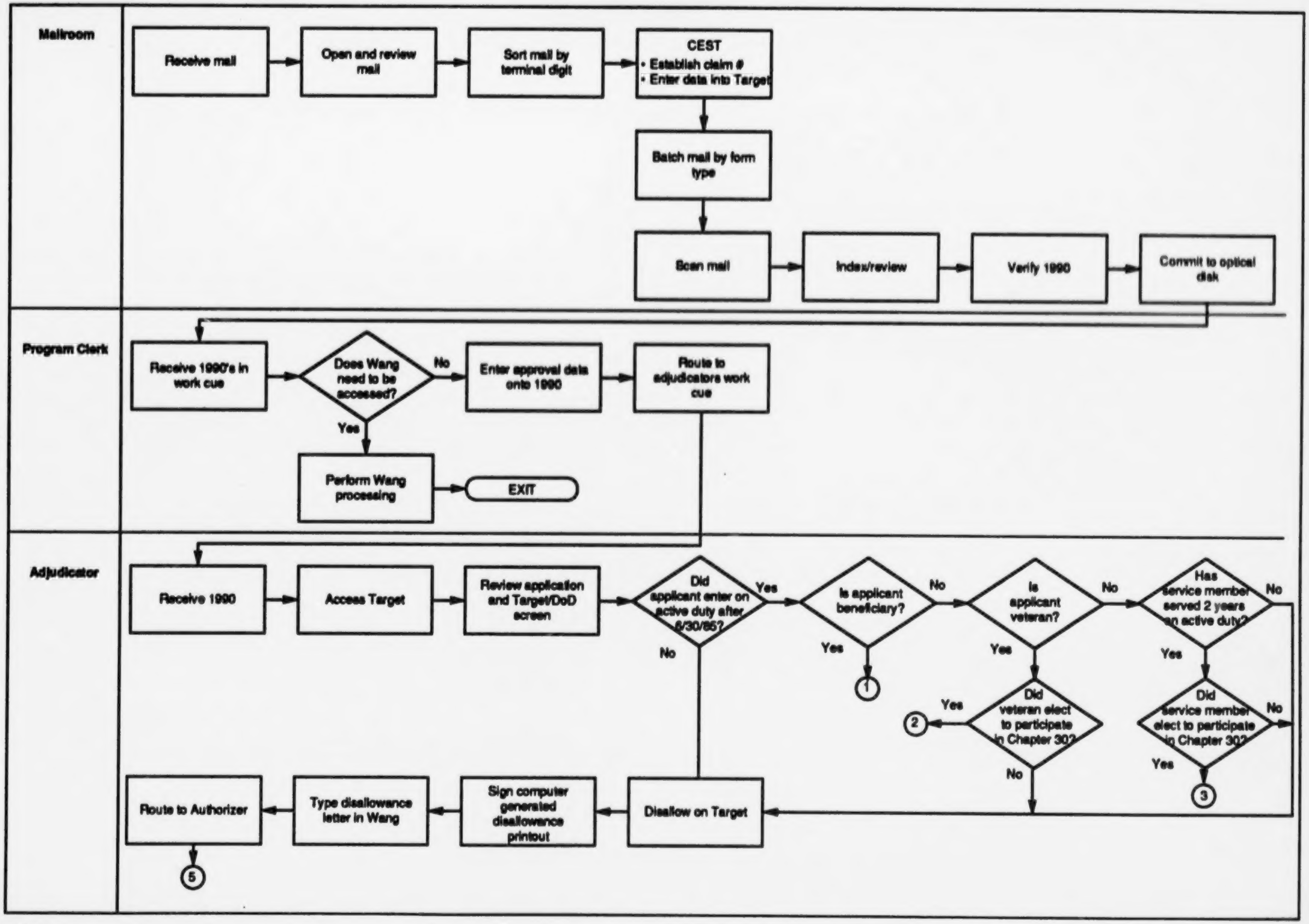
- Claims establishment
- Eligibility determination
- Authorization.

Exhibit II-4 provides a flow chart of the processing of a Chapter 30 original claim.

Claims Establishment

Once the Chapter 30 original claim is received in the mail, it is opened in the Administrative Division mail room and reviewed. Next, the mail is sorted by the type and original Chapter 30 applications are batched separately and forwarded to claims establishment (CEST) processing. A claim number is assigned to the application. This number, along with data from the application, is entered into the mainframe computer system, called TARGET. The original claim is then scanned, using an optical scanner, into the optical disk

Exhibit II-4(1)
CHAPTER 30
ORIGINAL CLAIMS PROCESS



Mailroom
Receive mail
Open and review mail
Sort mail by terminal digit
CEST
• Establish claim #
• Enter data into Target
Batch mail by form type
Scan mail
Index/review
Verify 1990
Commit to optical disk
Program Clerk
Receive 1990's in work cue
Does Wang need to be accessed?
No
Yes
Enter approval data onto 1990
Route to adjudicators work cue
Perform Wang processing
EXIT
Adjudicator
Receive 1990
Access Target
Review application and Target/DoD screen
Did applicant enter on active duty after 6/30/85?
Yes
No
Is applicant beneficiary?
No
Yes
1
Is applicant veteran?
No
Yes
Did veteran elect to participate in Chapter 30?
Yes
No
2
Has service member served 2 years on active duty?
No
Yes
Did service member elect to participate in Chapter 30?
No
Yes
3
Disallow on Target
Sign computer generated disallowance printout
Type disallowance letter in Wang
Route to Authorizer
5

Exhibit II-4(2)
CHAPTER 30
ORIGINAL CLAIMS PROCESS

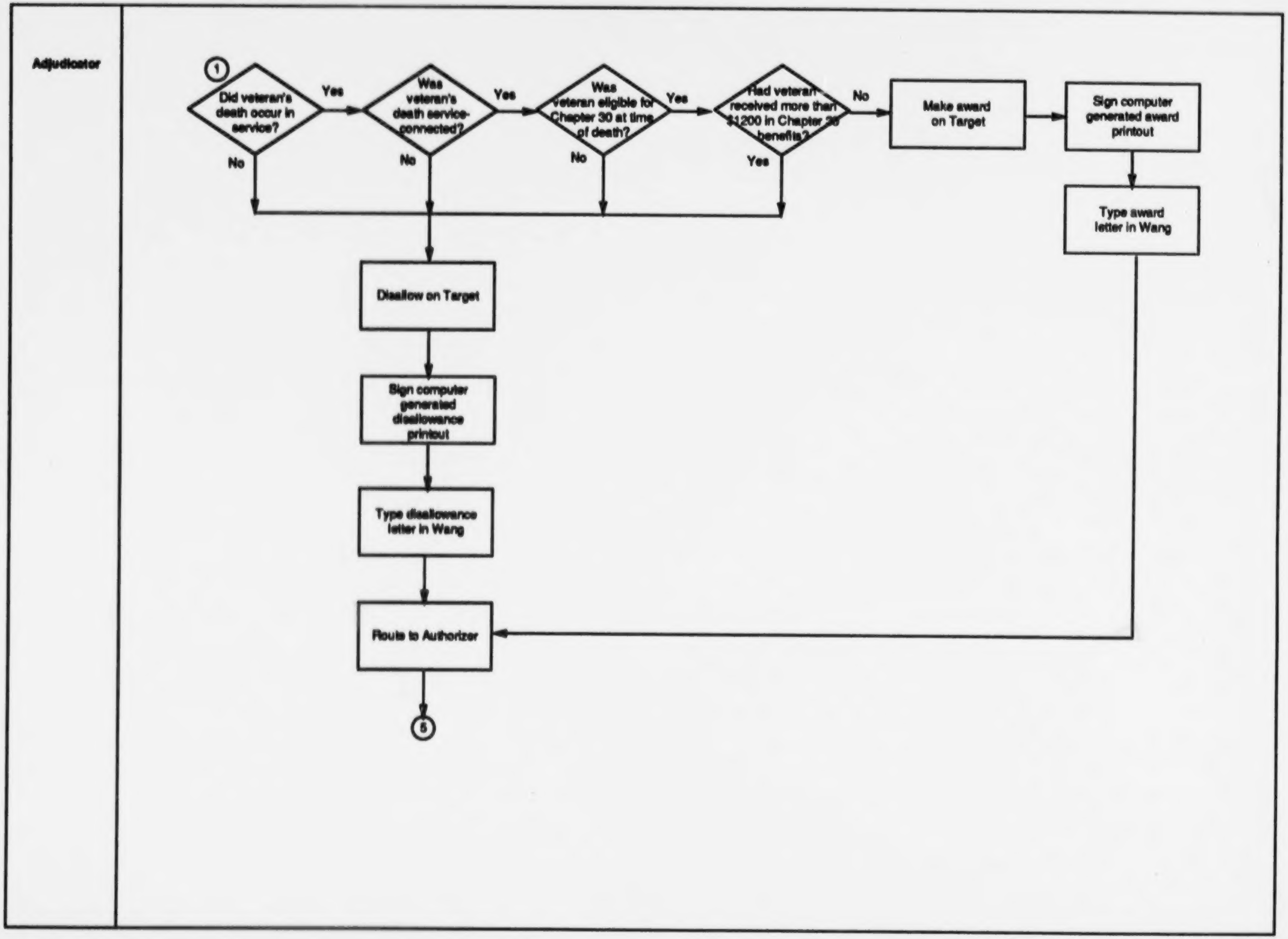

Adjudicator
①
Did veteran's death occur in service?
Yes
No
Was veteran's death service-connected?
Yes
No
Was veteran eligible for Chapter 30 at time of death?
Yes
No
Had veteran received more than $1200 in Chapter 30 benefits?
No
Yes
Make award on Target
Sign computer generated award printout
Type award letter in Wang
Disallow on Target
Sign computer generated disallowance printout
Type disallowance letter in Wang
Route to Authorizer
⑤

Exhibit II-4(4)
CHAPTER 30
ORIGINAL CLAIMS PROCESS

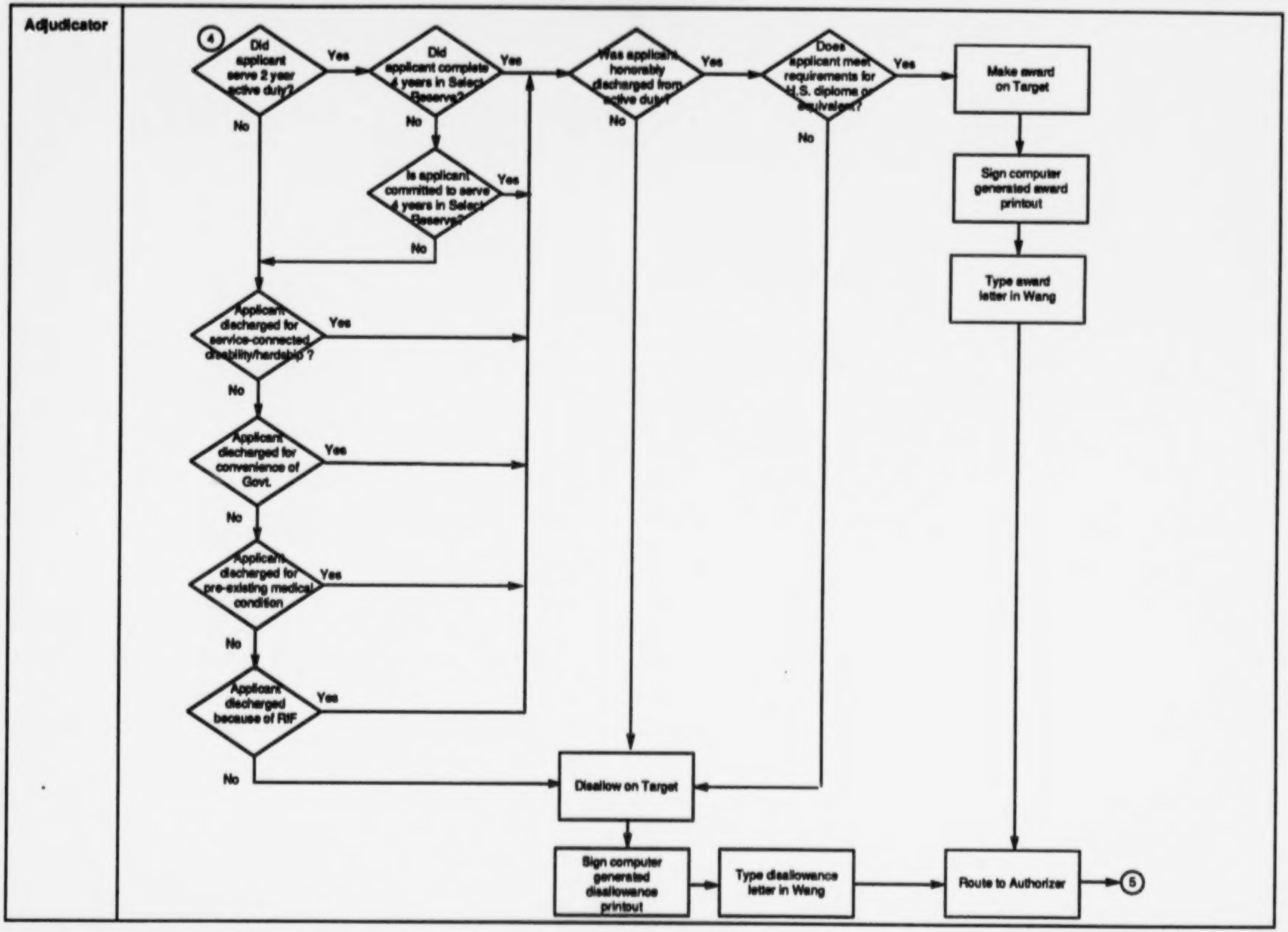

Adjudicator
4
Did applicant serve 2 year active duty?
Yes
No
Did applicant complete 4 years in Select Reserve?
Yes
No
Is applicant committed to serve 4 years in Select Reserve?
Yes
No
Was applicant honorably discharged from active duty?
Yes
No
Does applicant meet requirements for H.S. diploma or equivalent?
Yes
No
Make award on Target
Sign computer generated award printout
Type award letter in Wang
Applicant discharged for service-connected disability/hardship ?
Yes
No
Applicant discharged for convenience of Govt.
Yes
No
Applicant discharged for pre-existing medical condition
Yes
No
Applicant discharged because of RIF
Yes
No
Disallow on Target
Sign computer generated disallowance printout
Type disallowance letter in Wang
Route to Authorizer
5

Exhibit II-4(3)
CHAPTER 30
ORIGINAL CLAIMS PROCESS

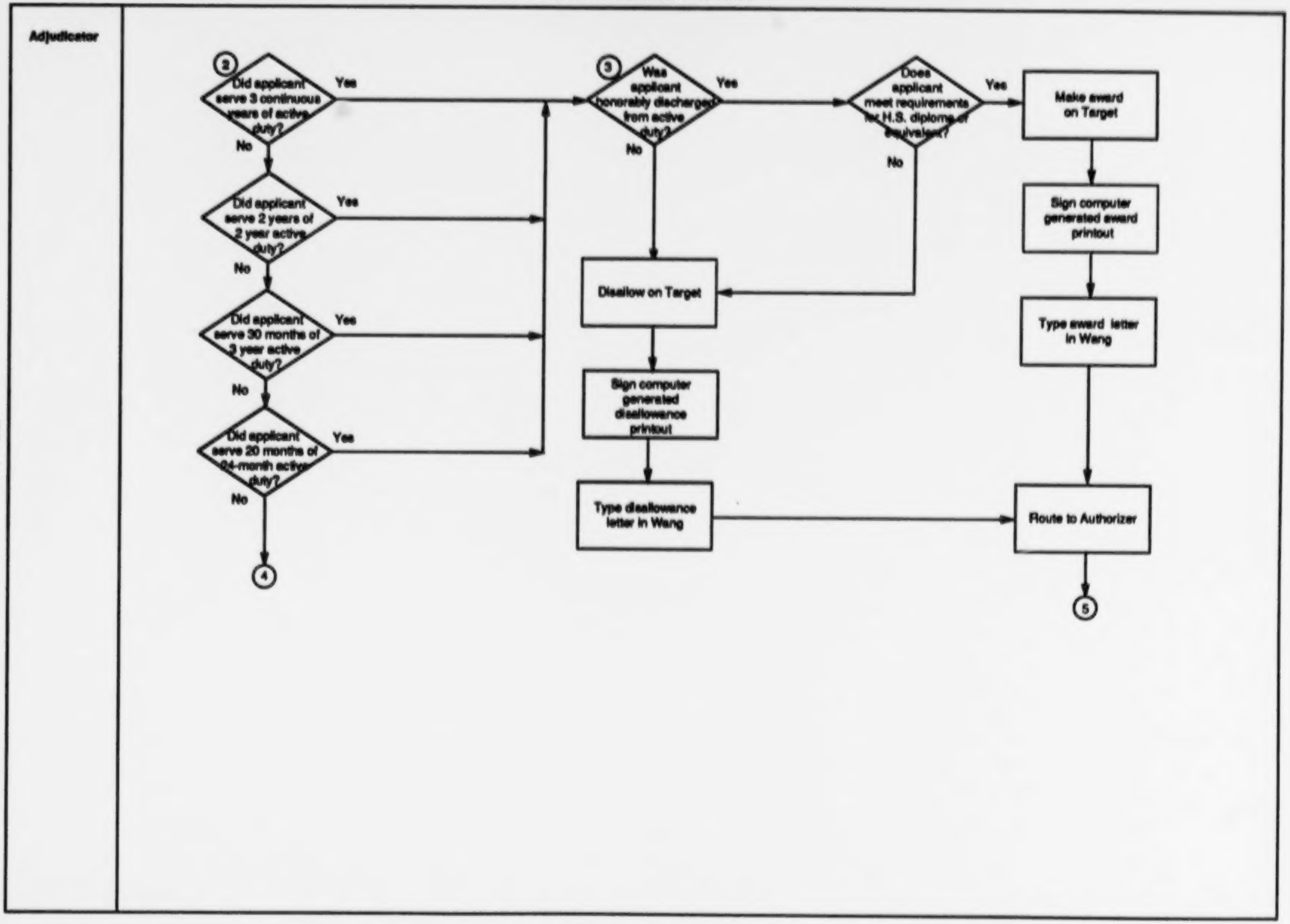
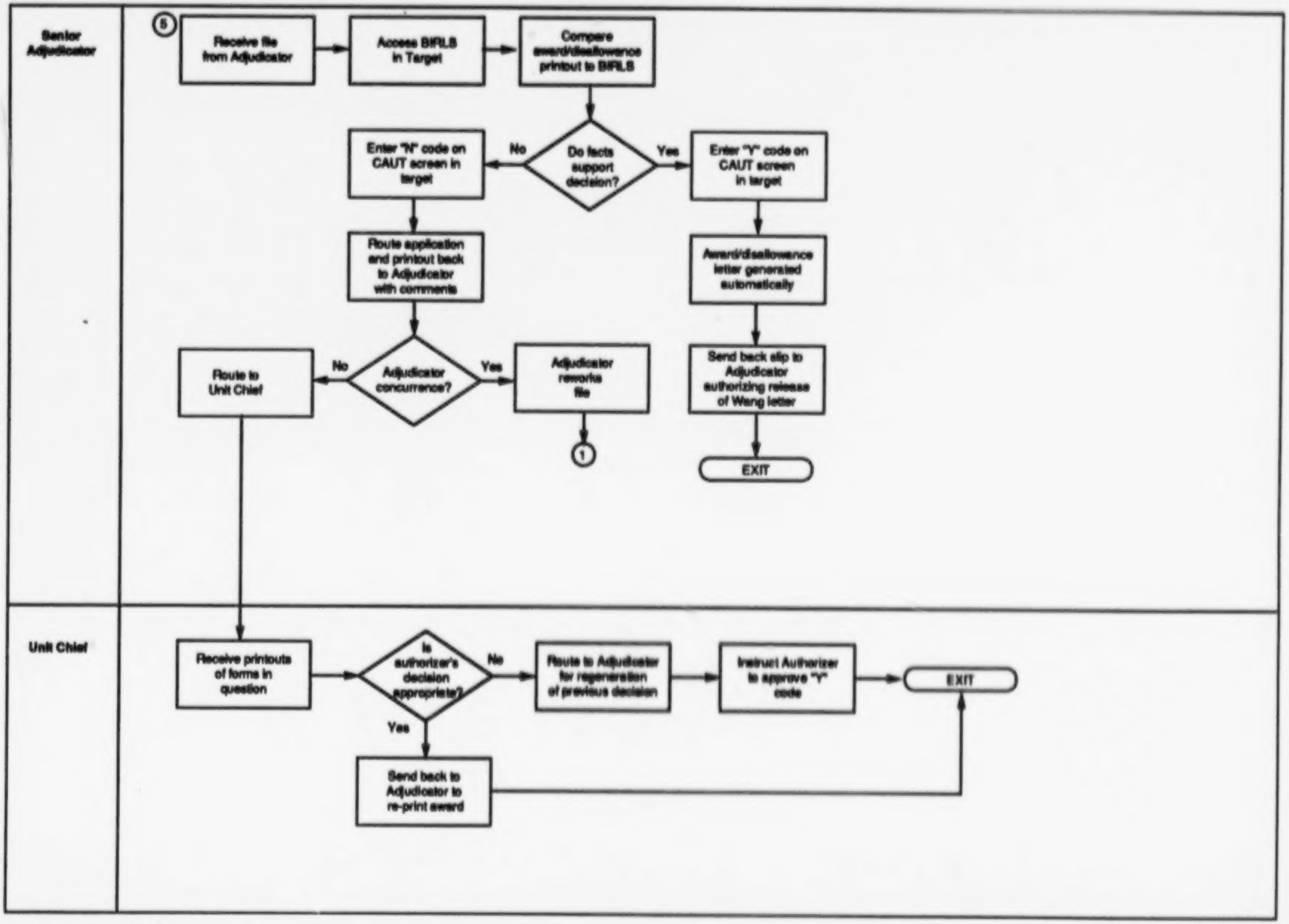

Adjudicator
2
Did applicant serve 3 continuous years of active duty?
Yes
No
Did applicant serve 2 years of 2 year active duty?
Yes
No
Did applicant serve 30 months of 3 year active duty?
Yes
No
Did applicant serve 20 months of 24-month active duty?
Yes
No
4
3
Was applicant honorably discharged from active duty?
Yes
No
Does applicant meet requirements for H.S. diploma or equivalent?
Yes
No
Make award on Target
Sign computer generated award printout
Type award letter in Wang
Disallow on Target
Sign computer generated disallowance printout
Type disallowance letter in Wang
Route to Authorizer
5

Exhibit II-4(5)
CHAPTER 30
ORIGINAL CLAIMS PROCESS


Senior Adjudicator
⑤
Receive file from Adjudicator
Access BIRLS in Target
Compare award/disallowance printout to BIRLS
Do facts support decision?
No
Yes
Enter "N" code on CAUT screen in target
Enter "Y" code on CAUT screen in target
Route application and printout back to Adjudicator with comments
Award/disallowance letter generated automatically
Adjudicator concurrence?
No
Yes
Route to Unit Chief
Adjudicator reworks file
①
Send back slip to Adjudicator authorizing release of Wang letter
EXIT
Unit Chief
Receive printouts of forms in question
Is authorizer's decision appropriate?
No
Yes
Route to Adjudicator for regeneration of previous decision
Instruct Authorizer to approve "Y" code
EXIT
Send back to Adjudicator to re-print award

system. After scanning, a program clerk indexes and reviews the document. A second program clerk verifies the indexes prior to committing the document to the optical disk. The document is electronically routed to the program clerk in the Adjudication Division who determines whether any additional correspondence needs to be sent to the claimant. The program clerk is also responsible for entering the school approval data from the facility file database onto the system.

Eligibility Determination

The original claim document is then electronically routed by the program clerk to the work queue for the adjudicators in the Adjudication Division. Upon retrieving a document from the work queue, the adjudicator accesses the BIRLS screen in TARGET to begin reviewing the application for eligibility determination.

The beneficiary identification and records location database (BIRLS) screen contains basic service identification information about the veteran. Information such as the veterans name, service number, type and length of service, type of discharge are contained in the BIRLS database and compared to the original application image on the optical disk screen. If all the information is consistent, the application is then compared with information from the DOD Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) database. The DMDC database is a copy of the military master record, which is a compilation of veteran's service information from the specific service branch. If inconsistencies appear in the information at any time during the eligibility process, the application is assigned to the pending file until the situation is resolved. Five types of information are needed to determine if a veteran is eligible for a Chapter 30 benefit:

- Enrollment status for the Chapter 30 program
- Date(s) of enlistment and discharge
- Reason for discharge
- Presence of a secondary school diploma or equivalent
- School/course approval information.

First the adjudicator reviews the veteran's file to determine if s/he enrolled in the Chapter 30 program. Then the active duty dates from the DMDC database are checked against the veterans discharge paper (DD-214).

The veteran's date(s) of active duty must meet the requirements presented in Exhibit I-3 for processing to continue. If a veteran does not qualify for Chapter 30 benefits because of the date of his or her enlistment duty, then he or she is denied benefits for Chapter 30. The adjudicator disallows the claim on the TARGET screen and signs a computer generated printout. Next, a disallowance letter is prepared and kept in electronic form until the Adjudication Division authorizer approves the decision.

Assuming the veteran's active duty dates meet Chapter 30 requirements, the reason for discharge is then examined. A veteran must have been discharged either honorably, for service-connected disability, or for convenience of the government to qualify for an award. If the veteran meets these qualifications, processing continues. If not, the claim is disallowed using the same procedure described above.

The veteran must have a high school diploma or equivalency in order to receive Chapter 30 benefits. The course at the school or training institution selected by the veteran must also be approved. If the veteran does not meet these qualifications, then the claim is disallowed using the same procedure described above. If the veteran meets these qualifications, the veteran receives a Chapter 30 award. The adjudicator enters the appropriate information into the TARGET screen which computes the award amount and generates an award printout. A standardized award letter is then generated through a WANG wordprocessing system. Lastly, the adjudicator annotates the award printout and releases the award letter once the authorizer confirms the award decision.

Authorization

Authorizers are staff of the Adjudication Division who are responsible for approving the work done by the adjudicators. For Chapter 30 claims processing, the authorizer reviews the application and award (or disallowance) computer printout to ensure that the appropriate decision was made by the adjudicator.

The authorizer first accesses the BIRLS screen in TARGET. This information is then compared to the adjudicator's award/disallowance printout. The authorizer verifies whether or not the claimant applied for the proper benefit, and ensures that the relevant information about the veteran supports the adjudicator's decision. If any of these findings are negative and the decision has been made by the adjudicator for an award, the authorizer enters an "N" code into the computer, signifying a disallowance. The application and award printout are then routed back to the adjudicator with relevant comments from the authorizer. The adjudicator reworks the case if he or she is in agreement with the authorizer, otherwise the case is routed to the Unit Chief for a final decision.

If all of the information about the veteran is verified by the authorizer, then the authorizer gives final approval for the award. A "Y" code is entered on the computer which activates the payment process. This payment process is accomplished at Hines, IL. The authorizer notifies the adjudicator to release the relevant correspondence to the veteran This transaction automatically initiates the award payment to the veteran.

3. INQUIRY PROCESSING IS CARRIED OUT BY ALL 58 VA REGIONAL OFFICES AND VACO

Both VACO and all VA regional offices respond to Chapter 30 inquiries. Inquiries are received from veterans, congresspersons, government officials, school officials, and other audiences primarily through the mail and telephone.

Veterans request information on eligibility for Chapter 30 benefits, approved schools, status of claim and payment, and procedures for enrollment certification cards. Congresspersons and government officials inquire about the status of veterans' claims within their jurisdiction. School officials' questions usually concerning the status of Chapter 30 students at their institution.

(1) Chapter 30 Inquiries Are Processed By Both VACO And VA Regional Offices

Within VACO, the Education Policy and Program Administration Office is responsible for answering all Chapter 30 inquiries. This office either receives these inquiries directly or they are routed to the Program Administration Chief (PAC) usually from the Secretary's office. Then, the PAC either responds to the inquiries himself or assigns the inquiries to the education consultant staff.

In the 58 VA regional offices, the Veterans Service Division is responsible for responding to telephone inquiries while the Adjudication, Finance, or Veterans Service Division may answer a written inquiry. Often, the staff of the Veterans Service Division, called Veteran Benefit Counselors (VBCs), requests information from the Adjudication and Finance Division in order to answer an inquiry. Inquiries are categorized by the regional offices as being of two types:

- Benefit payment inquiries (BPI) which include questions on compensation, pension, and education
- General assistance inquiries (GAI) which include questions on basic eligibility and approved schools.

This same structure for identifying and processing inquiries exists in the St. Louis regional office.

(2) Inquiries Are Processed In A Standardized Way

VACO and VA regional offices process written and telephonic inquiries using standardized procedures. These processes can be divided into the following four categories:

- VACO written inquiries
- VACO telephonic inquiries
- VA Regional Office written inquiries
- VA Regional Office telephonic inquiries.

A description of each category is presented below.

VACO Written Inquiries

A standard process is used by VACO to respond to mail inquiries. Written inquiries may be received by the Secretary, the Chief Benefits Director, the Director of VR&E Service, or the Program Administration Chief (PAC). All written inquiries are routed to the PAC and inquiries are answered by either the PAC or an available education consultant. Exhibit II-5 provides a flow chart of this process.

The standardized process begins by the PAC's secretary checking the inquirer's name against a list of prior correspondence to central office regarding the Chapter 30 program. If the veteran or school official has previously written central office, the secretary locates and attaches a copy of the previously-written letter(s) to the current inquiry. During this process the secretary ensures that the inquiry has not already been answered. If not, the inquiry is forwarded to the PAC who assigns the inquiry to an education consultant.

The education consultant then determines whether information on the mainframe computer system, TARGET, can be used to respond to the inquiry. If TARGET

Exhibit II-5(1)
CENTRAL OFFICE
WRITTEN INQUIRIES

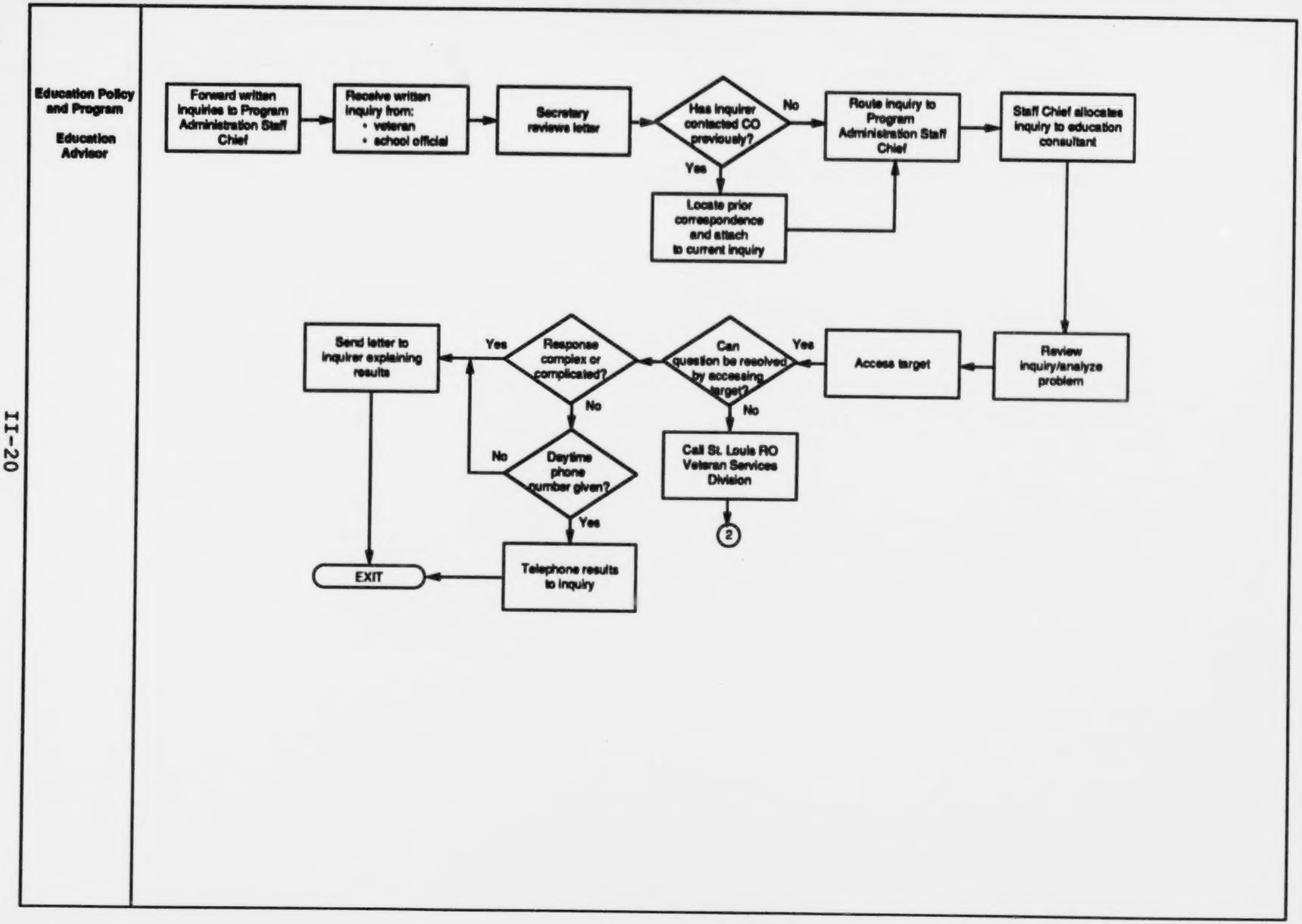
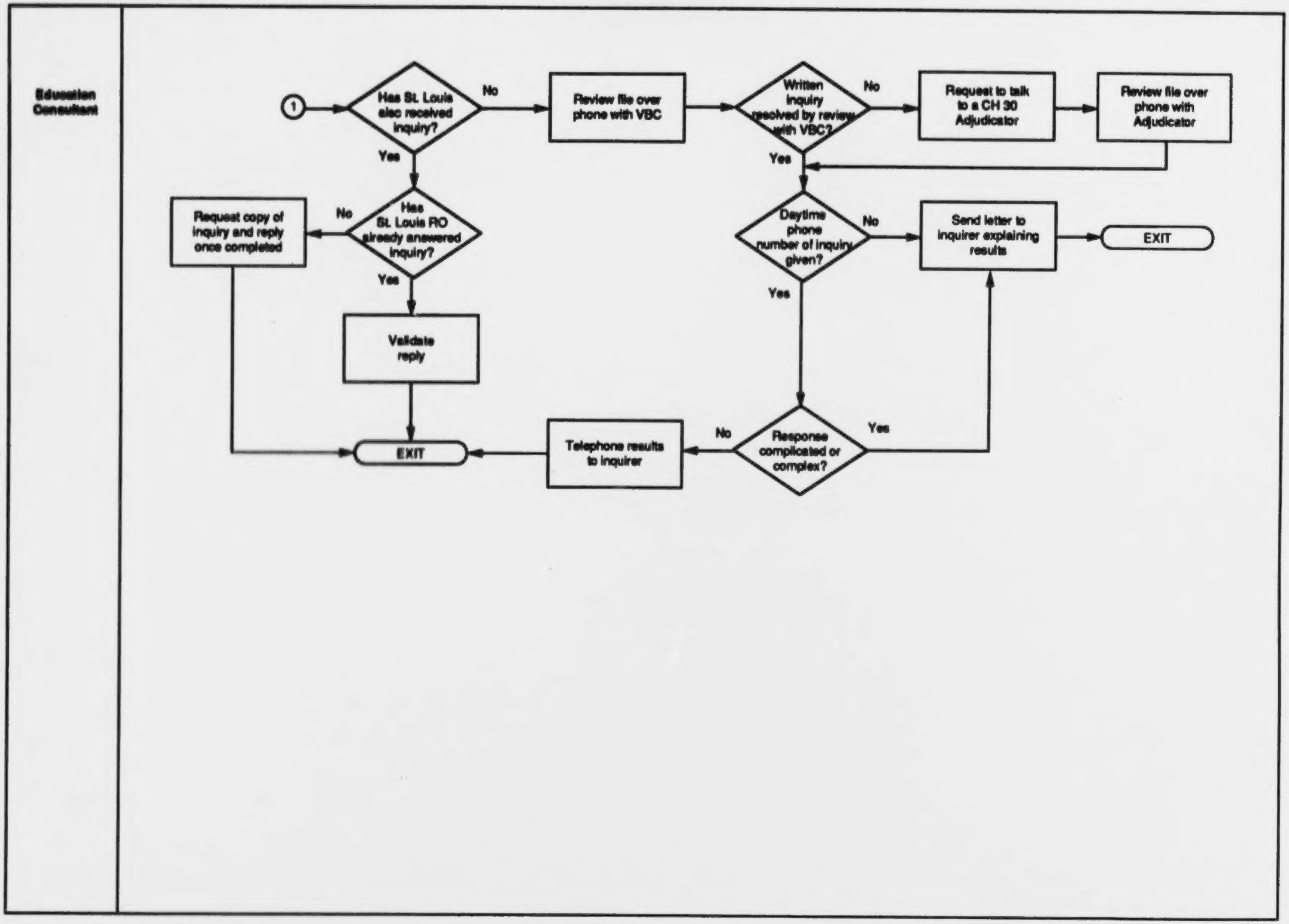

Education Policy and Program
Education Advisor
Forward written inquiries to Program Administration Staff Chief
Receive written inquiry from:
• veteran
• school official
Secretary reviews letter
Has inquirer contacted CO previously?
No
Yes
Locate prior correspondence and attach to current inquiry
Route inquiry to Program Administration Staff Chief
Staff Chief allocates inquiry to education consultant
Review inquiry/analyze problem
Access target
Can question be resolved by accessing target?
Yes
No
Call St. Louis RO Veteran Services Division
2
Response complex or complicated?
Yes
No
Daytime phone number given?
No
Yes
Send letter to inquirer explaining results
Telephone results to inquiry
EXIT

Exhibit II-5(2)
CENTRAL OFFICE
WRITTEN INQUIRIES


Education Consultant
1
Has St. Louis also received inquiry?
No
Yes
Review file over phone with VBC
Written inquiry resolved by review with VBC?
No
Yes
Request to talk to a CH 30 Adjudicator
Review file over phone with Adjudicator
Has St. Louis RO already answered inquiry?
No
Yes
Request copy of inquiry and reply once completed
Validate reply
Daytime phone number of inquiry given?
No
Yes
Send letter to inquirer explaining results
EXIT
Response complicated or complex?
No
Yes
Telephone results to inquirer
EXIT

contains the necessary information, the education consultant prepares and mails an appropriate answering letter from the person whom the inquiry was originally addressed or, if the response is uncomplicated, makes a telephone call to the inquirer. When TARGET does not contain the necessary information to respond to the written inquiry, the education consultant calls the St. Louis regional office Veteran Benefits Counselor (VBC) to obtain the needed information.

The education consultant also investigates whether the St. Louis regional office received and/or answered the same inquiry. If the inquiry has been received and answered by the St. Louis office, the education consultant validates the reply and the process is completed. If the inquiry has been received and not yet answered by St. Louis, the education consultant will request that a copy of St. Louis' inquiry and response be sent to VACO once the response is completed by St. Louis.

If the inquiry was not received by St. Louis, the education consultant reviews the inquirer's file over the telephone with the VBC. If the VBC cannot provide the necessary information to resolve the inquiry, the education consultant will review the file with an adjudicator. Once resolved, the education consultant telephones the inquirer to explain the results. If a daytime phone number is not available, the education consultant sends a letter with the results to the inquirer.

VACO Telephonic Inquiries

A standardized process is used by VACO to respond to telephonic inquiries. Telephonic inquiries are received by either the Chief Benefits Director, the Director of Education Service, or the Program Administration Chief (PAC). All telephonic inquiries are routed to the PAC. All inquiries are reviewed by the PAC who either answers them directly or delegates the inquiries to his staff of education consultants. Exhibit II-6 provides a flow chart of this process.

The standard process used for answering a telephone inquiry includes the following steps. First, the PAC or the education consultant decides whether or not the inquiry can be resolved without viewing TARGET, the mainframe computer system discussed earlier in this chapter. If this information is not necessary for resolving the question, the inquiry is answered and a

Exhibit II-6(1)
CENTRAL OFFICE
TELEPHONE INQUIRIES

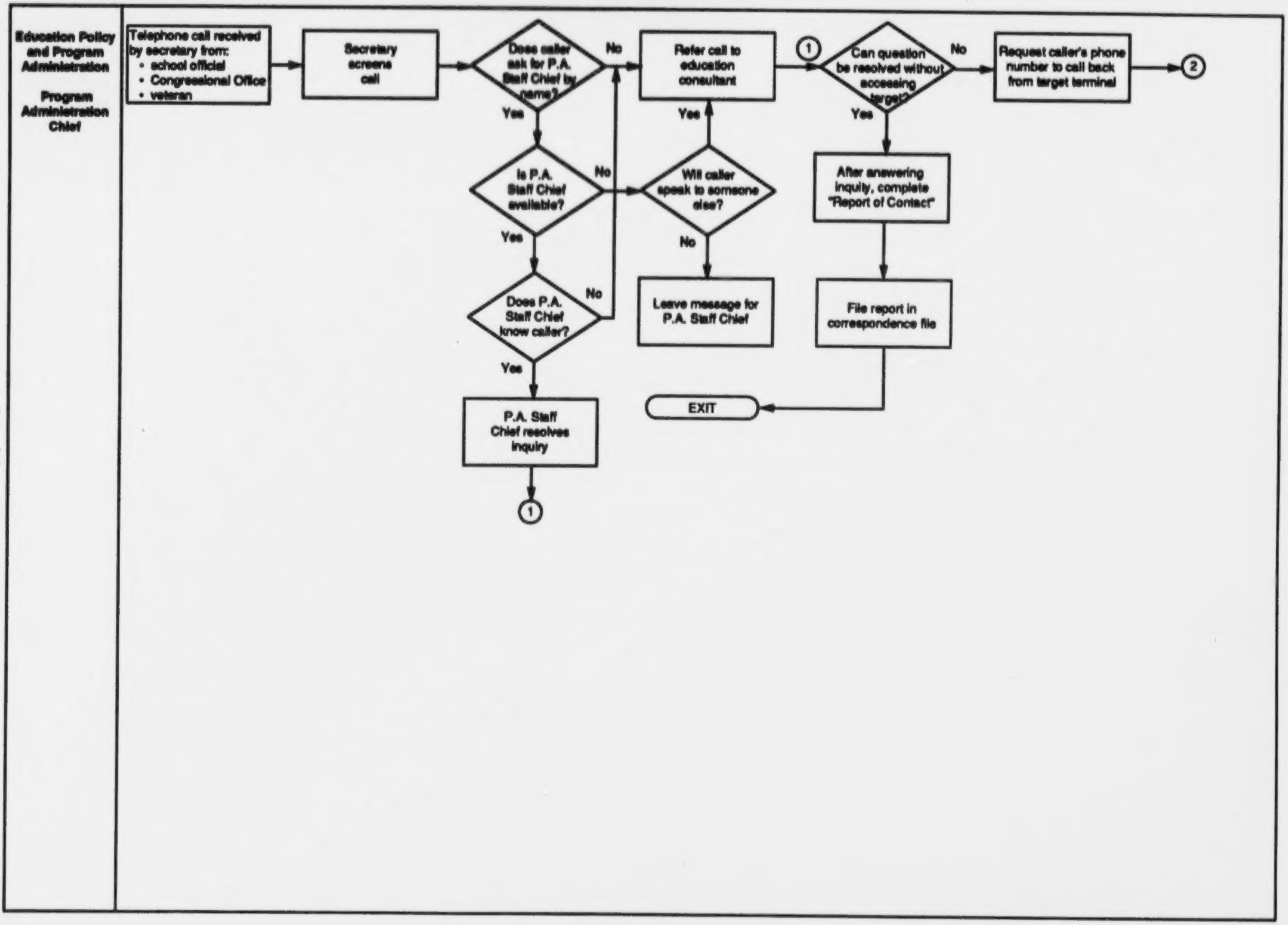
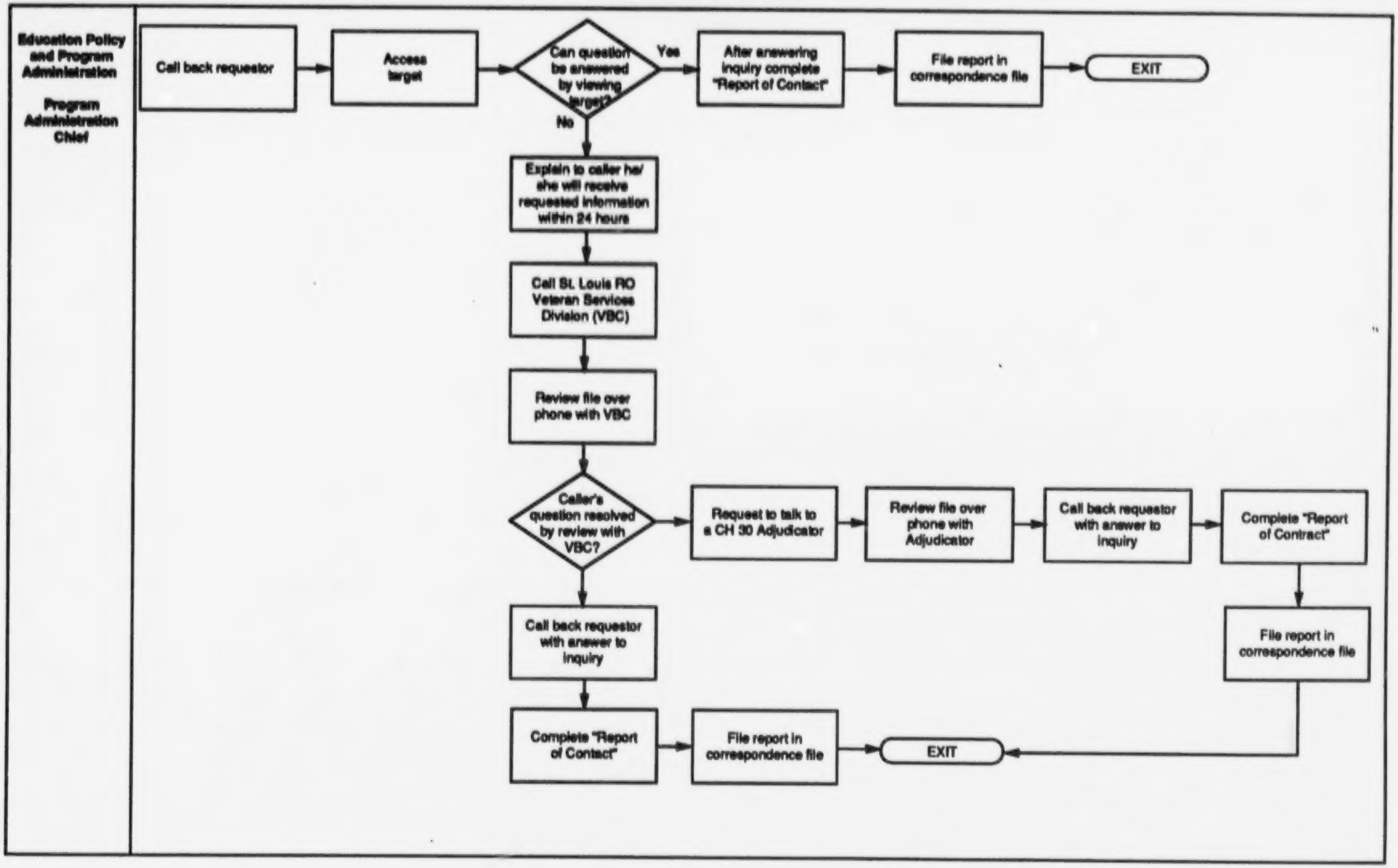

Education Policy and Program Administration
Program Administration Chief
Telephone call received by secretary from:
• school official
• Congressional Office
• veteran
Secretary screens call
Does caller ask for P.A. Staff Chief by name?
No
Yes
Is P.A. Staff Chief available?
No
Yes
Does P.A. Staff Chief know caller?
No
Yes
P.A. Staff Chief resolves inquiry
1
Refer call to education consultant
Yes
Will caller speak to someone else?
No
Leave message for P.A. Staff Chief
EXIT
1
Can question be resolved without accessing target?
No
Yes
After answering inquiry, complete "Report of Contact"
File report in correspondence file
Request caller's phone number to call back from target terminal
2

Exhibit II-6(2)
CENTRAL OFFICE
TELEPHONE INQUIRIES


Education Policy and Program Administration
Program Administration Chief
Call back requestor
Access target
Can question be answered by viewing target?
Yes
No
After answering inquiry complete "Report of Contact"
File report in correspondence file
EXIT
Explain to caller he/ she will receive requested information within 24 hours
Call St. Louis RO Veteran Services Division (VBC)
Review file over phone with VBC
Caller's question resolved by review with VBC?
Request to talk to a CH 30 Adjudicator
Review file over phone with Adjudicator
Call back requestor with answer to inquiry
Complete "Report of Contract"
File report in correspondence file
Call back requestor with answer to inquiry
Complete "Report of Contact"
File report in correspondence file
EXIT

"Report of Contact" form is completed and filed. If information from the TARGET system is necessary for answering the inquiry, the system is accessed and the inquirer is called back with the information.

If the TARGET system does not contain the needed information, the St. Louis regional office must be called. First, the PAC or education consultant informs the inquirer that he/she will receive the requested information within twenty-four hours. Then the PAC or education consultant contacts St. Louis and reviews the file of the veteran in question with a St. Louis Veterans Benefits Counselor (VBC) over the phone. If the VBC is unable to resolve the inquiry, the PAC or education clerk reviews the file with an adjudicator. After receiving the information, the PAC or education clerk then telephones the inquirer with the answer. A "Report of Contact" is completed by the PAC or education clerk and filed. Over half of the telephone inquiries received by the Education Policy and Program Administration Office are answered the same day.

VA Regional Office Written Inquiries

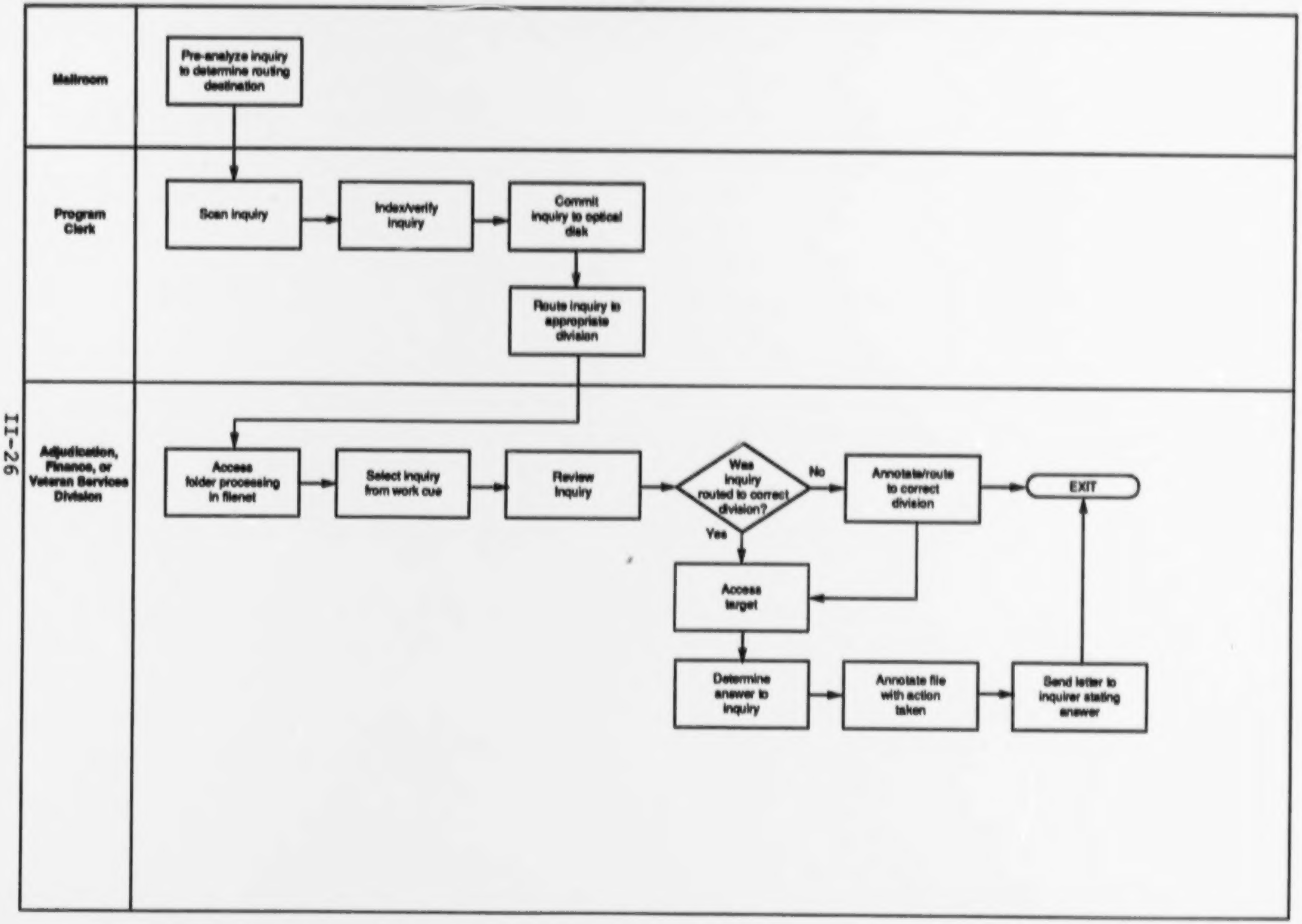
The process used by the VA regional offices for responding to mail inquiries is standardized. Exhibit II-7 provides a flow chart of this process. First, the mailroom receives a written inquiry. The inquiries are scanned, verified, and committed to the optical disk system. The mail clerk then analyzes the letter to determine the appropriate division destination as follows:

- Inquiries concerning status and amounts of an award are sent to the Adjudication Division
- Inquiries regarding a lost payment or overpayment are sent to the Finance Division
- Inquiries regarding general questions about the Freedom of Information Act or requests for copies of a file are sent to the Veteran Services Division.

Each division responds to the inquiry using the same process. First, the adjudicator, finance clerk, or VBC verifies that the inquiry has been routed to the correct division. If not, the inquiry is properly routed. Next, the mainframe computer system, TARGET, is accessed to determine the answer to the inquiry. The staff person may also need to access Filenet to respond to the Chapter 30 inquiry. Once the problem is solved,

Exhibit II-7

REGIONAL OFFICE WRITTEN INQUIRIES


Mailroom
Pre-analyze inquiry to determine routing destination
Program Clerk
Scan inquiry
Index/verify inquiry
Commit inquiry to optical disk
Route inquiry to appropriate division
Adjudication, Finance, or Veteran Services Division
Access folder processing in filenet
Select inquiry from work cue
Review inquiry
Was inquiry routed to correct division?
No
Yes
Annotate/route to correct division
EXIT
Access target
Determine answer to inquiry
Annotate file with action taken
Send letter to inquirer stating answer

the file is annotated with the action taken. Lastly, a letter is sent to the inquirer informing him or her of the results.

VA Regional Office Telephonic Inquiries

Telephone inquiries are received directly by VBCs in each regional office. Exhibit II-8 provides a flow chart of this process. The VBC accesses the available computer data and determines if the necessary information is available to respond to the inquiry. If the data is present, the VBC will respond to the inquirer directly. Otherwise some VBCs will call the St.Louis VBC to help answer the inquiry through the pending TARGET screen. Only the regional offices connected to the Regional Data Processing Center (RDPC) in the Central regional have access to the pending case information in TARGET. Finally, the VBC will record the action taken to resolve the inquiry on Form 27-8386.

If the question can not be resolved by available computer data, then the VBC completes Form 27-8386. This form contains claimant information such as name, address, and file number and inquiry information such as date, time, and type of inquiry. Once the pertinent information has been recorded, the VBC sends the form to the Adjudication or Finance Division for further investigation. The Adjudication or Finance Division then forwards the response to the VBC who in turn telephones the inquirer with the information. Finally, the VBC records the action taken to resolve the inquiry on Form 27-8386.

4. CHANGES TO THE VA'S ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM ARE OCCURRING IN ANTICIPATION OF PROJECTED PROGRAM GROWTH

It is anticipated that the Chapter 30 program will become the largest education program currently administered by the VA. By 1994, Chapter 30 benefits will have been provided for an estimated 224,300 veterans.

(1) Chapter 30 Is Becoming The Largest Education Assistance Program Administered By The VA

The Chapter 30 Program is projected to grow steadily and will become the largest education program currently administered by the VA. VA projections include numbers of trainees and original applications as well as anticipated monthly certifications, VA workload projections, and benefit payments.

Exhibit II-8
REGIONAL OFFICE
TELEPHONE INQUIRIES

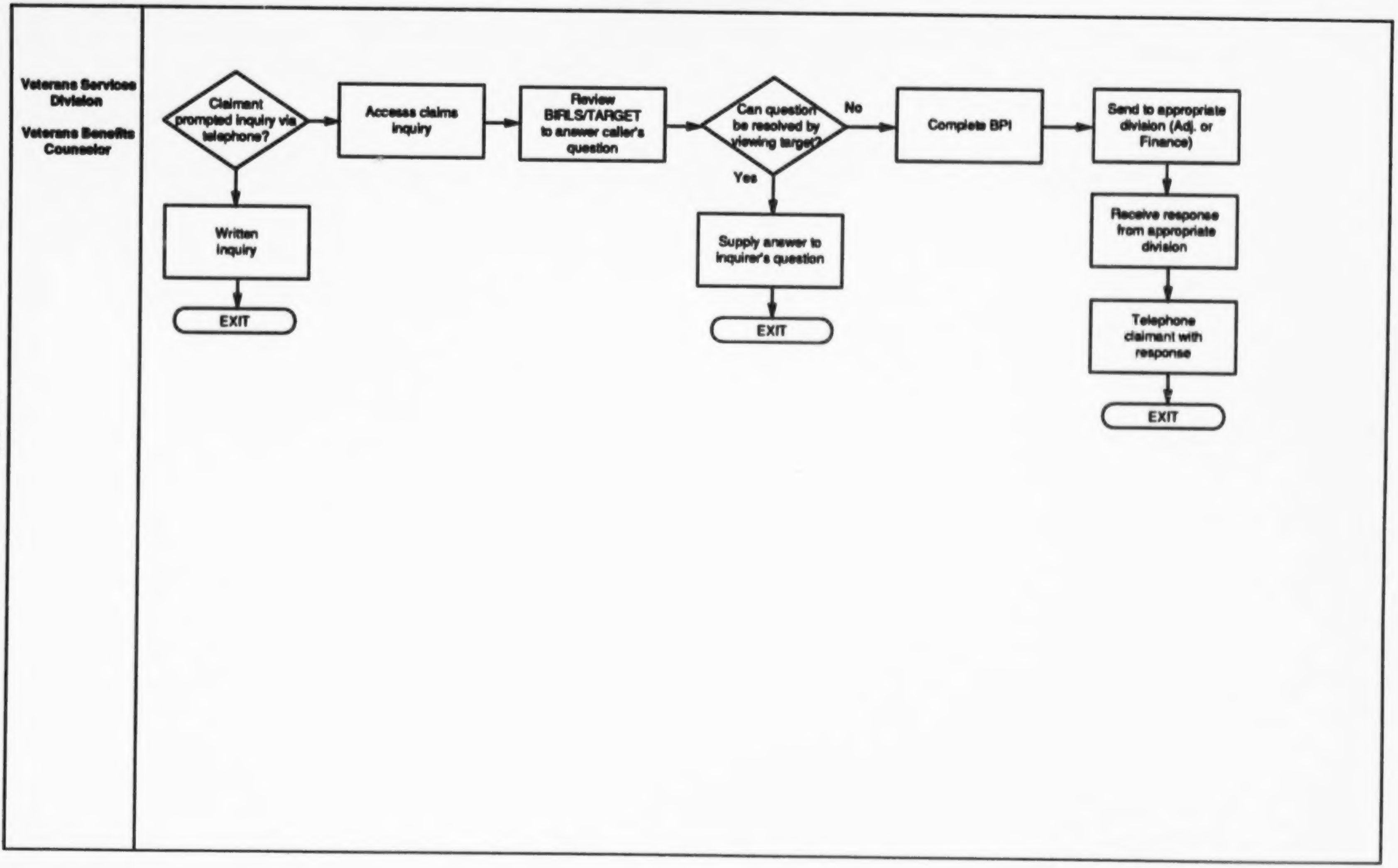

Veterans Services Division
Veterans Benefits Counselor
Claimant prompted inquiry via telephone?
Access claims inquiry
Review BIRLS/TARGET to answer caller's question
Can question be resolved by viewing target?
No
Yes
Complete BPI
Send to appropriate division (Adj. or Finance)
Written inquiry
EXIT
Supply answer to inquirer's question
EXIT
Receive response from appropriate division
Telephone claimant with response
EXIT

Exhibit II-9 illustrates the projected increase in trainees for the Chapter 30 Program. By 1994, 224,300 Chapter 30 veterans and servicepersons are projected to receive Chapter 30 benefits. This projection is over three times the actual amount of initial Chapter 30 trainees in 1987. The Chapter 30 original claims received by St. Louis during the period 1987-1989 reflect the outcome of the steady increase in Chapter 30 trainees, as seen in Exhibit II-10. In August of 1987, St. Louis received 200 original applications. This number had increased to 3,026 original applications received in St. Louis by September 1988. As increasing numbers of original claims are processed, the amount of monthly certifications received by St. Louis also increases since each veteran must complete a certification of attendance each month in order to receive his or her benefit payment. This situation is shown in Exhibit II-11.

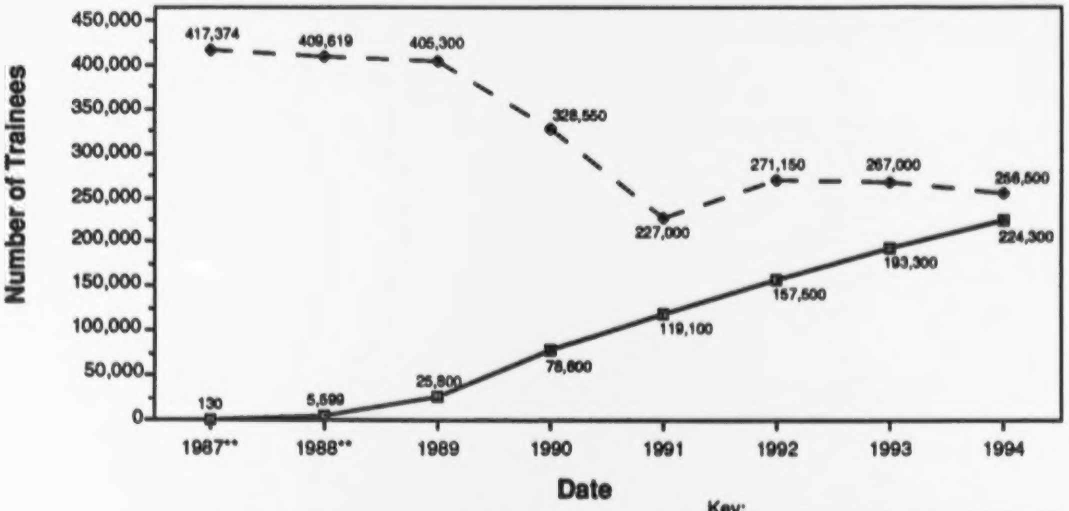
With the solid increase in both original applications and certifications received by St. Louis, more full time employee equivalent (FTEE) are needed for Chapter 30 processing. This quantity is determined by combining the projected Chapter 30 workload and the appropriate local base weight figures assigned to an end product. By 1994, St. Louis would need approximately 254 FTEEs to process Chapter 30 claims. As shown in Exhibit II-12, this figure is well over three times the projected FTEE needed for the Chapter 30 workload in 1989.

The cumulative payments for Chapter 30 paid to veterans by St. Louis has also expanded with certification processing. As illustrated in Exhibit II-13, over $20 million has been paid to Chapter 30 trainees since July 1986. For 1989 alone, St. Louis expects to pay approximately $33 million in benefits to Chapter 30 veterans. VACO's annual projection for Chapter 30 benefits payments closely matches St. Louis expectations. Exhibit II-14 presents VACO-projected payments to Chapter 30 veterans and servicepersons over the next five years, that are anticipated to value at close to $300 million. Clearly, Chapter 30 is becoming the largest education assistance program currently offered by the VA.

(2) Two Administrative Activities Are Taking Place In Response To Anticipated Program Growth

The VA is aware of the dramatic projections for Chapter 30 and is preparing for them appropriately. The VA has focused on two types of activities for the Chapter 30 program:

Exhibit II-9
PROJECTED VA EDUCATION PROGRAM TRAINEES*
(FY 1987 - 1994)



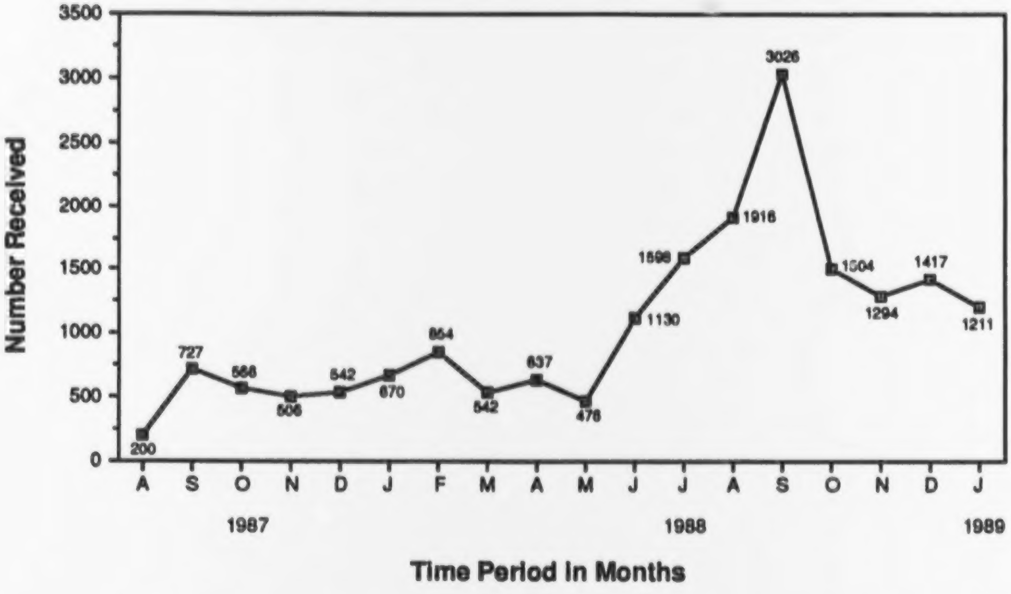
Notes: * Chapter 30, Chapter 32, Chapter 34, Chapter 35, Chapter 106 & Sec 901 and 903 trainees.

** 1987 and 1988 figures are actual figures.

Key:

- Chapter 30 Trainees.
- Chapter 32, Chapter 34, Chapter 35, Chapter 106 & Sec 901 and 903 Trainees.

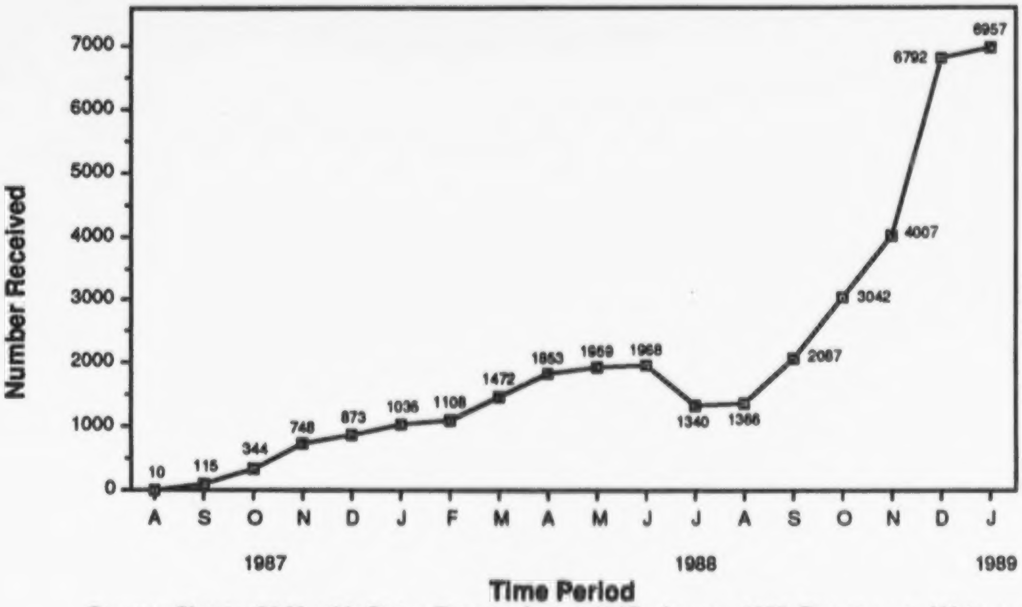
Exhibit II-10
CHAPTER 30 ORIGINAL APPLICATIONS (1990) RECEIVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, ST. LOUIS, MO REGIONAL OFFICE
(AUGUST 1987 - JANUARY 1989)



Source: Chapter 30 Monthly Status Reports, August 1987 - January 1989. Department of Veterans Affairs, St. Louis, MO.

Exhibit II-11

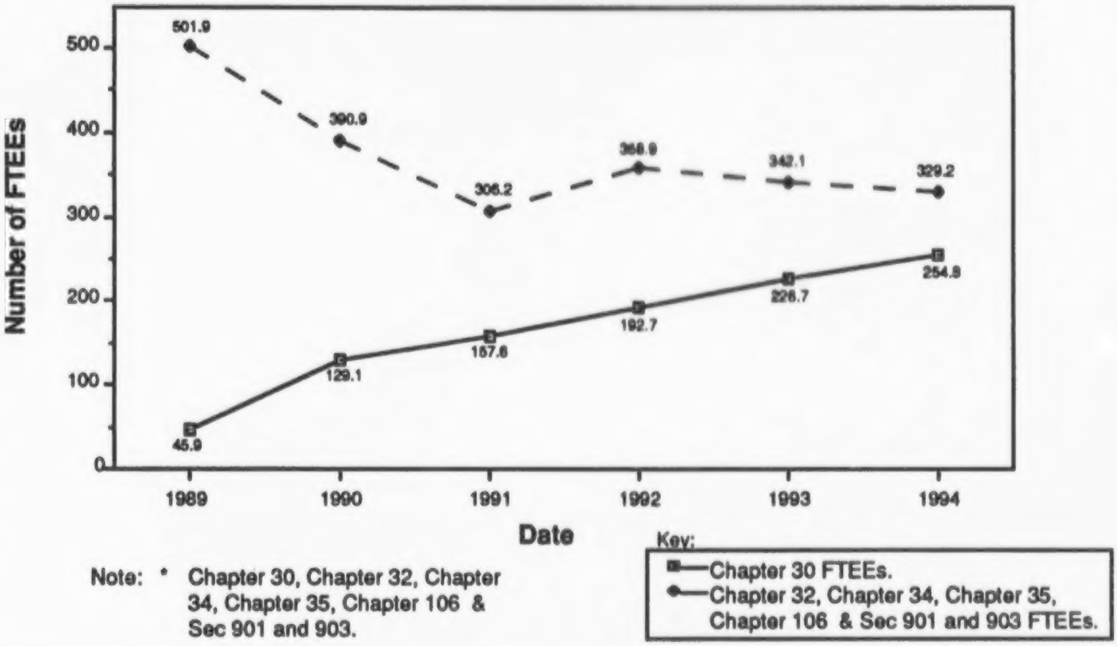
CHAPTER 30 MONTHLY CERTIFICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, ST. LOUIS, MO REGIONAL OFFICE (AUGUST 1987 - JANUARY 1989)



Source: Chapter 30 Monthly Status Reports, August 1987 - January 1989, Department of Veterans Affairs, St. Louis, MO.

Exhibit II-12

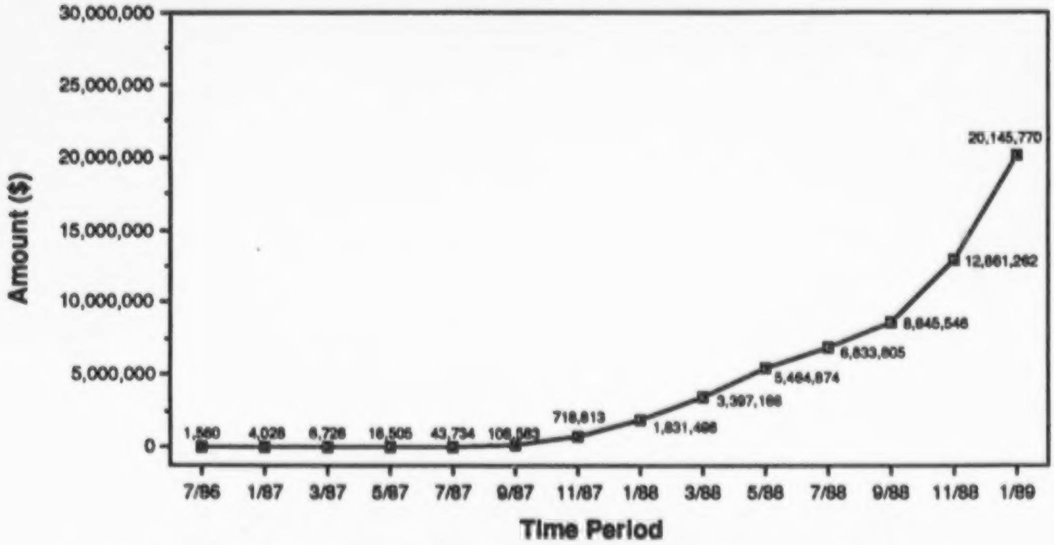
PROJECTED VA EDUCATION PROGRAM* ADJUDICATION DIVISION WORKLOAD EXPRESSED IN FULL TIME EMPLOYEE EQUIVALENTS (FTEE) (FY 1989 - 1994)



Note: * Chapter 30, Chapter 32, Chapter 34, Chapter 35, Chapter 106 & Sec 901 and 903.

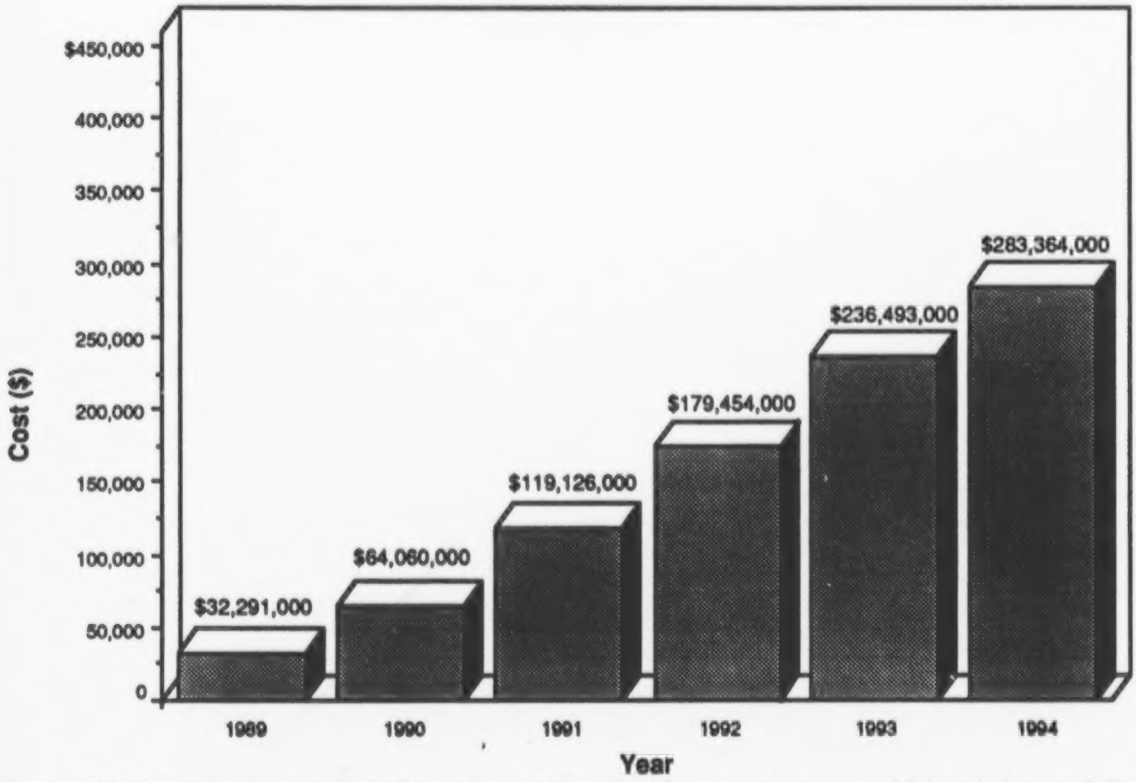
Source: Chief, Central Office Operations, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C., 1989.

Exhibit II-13
CUMULATIVE PAYMENTS FOR CHAPTER 30 PAID TO VETERANS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, ST. LOUIS, MO REGIONAL OFFICE
(JULY 1986 - JANUARY 1989)



Source: Chapter 30 Payment Schedule, Department of Veterans Affairs, St. Louis, MO, 1989.

Exhibit II-14
PROJECTED ANNUAL CHAPTER 30 BASIC BENEFITS PAYMENTS TO VETERANS AND ACTIVE DUTY TRAINEES
(FY 1989 - 1994)



Source: "Chapter 30 Caseload and Basic Benefit Costs, 1989 - 1994," Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C., 1989.

- Regionalized benefits processing
- Internal and external management studies

The VA has regularly assessed the effectiveness of centralized processing in preparation for resolving problems associated with the rapid increase in Chapter 30 participants. The VA is also conducting a variety of internal and external management studies in order to continually improve the Chapter 30 program.

Chapter 30 was initially centralized in St. Louis because of its small program size and the ability to test the optical disk prototype. However, the VA realized alternative plans needed to be developed as the program grew beyond the resource capabilities of the St. Louis regional office. After extensive data collection and subsequent internal reports, VA management determined regionalization of the Chapter 30 program would be most effective. The VA regionalization proposal involves the creation of four regional processing offices located in Atlanta, GA; Buffalo, NY; Muskogee, OK; and St. Louis, MO. These regional offices would process Chapter 30 benefits for all veterans in their region. These four offices would have a direct link to their regional data processing center (RDPC) and were not chosen for geographic accessibility by beneficiaries.

The VA is also conducting many internal management studies to monitor the Chapter 30 program and help plan the changes. They include:

- Report on Congressional correspondence
- Report on the impact of Chapter 30 processing
- Management study on certification processing.

The report on Congressional correspondence and Chapter 30 processing are in-house papers that assess Chapter 30 inquiry and benefit processing. The management study focuses on one particular aspect of benefits processing.

The St. Louis regional office's Congressional correspondence was analyzed by the VBA field operation staff for significant problem areas. Forty-nine cases from September 15 through November 30, 1988 were reviewed. The majority of the Congressionals, 63%, involved payment issues. Aside from reasons for the delay in payments, veterans were most concerned with their rate of payment being less than expected. Primarily, the veterans misunderstood the role of the kicker amounts from DOD. Veterans were unaware that time in service requirements determined the kicker amount. Therefore, if a serviceperson is discharged earlier than his or her initial contract time, the kicker amount is reduced accordingly.

The impact of Chapter 30 processing was written by VBA. A VBA survey specialist recorded the Chapter 30 workflow by surveying the St. Louis regional office for the week of January 9, 1989. The impact of Chapter 30 benefit processing was also documented in order to help VACO make budgetary projections for the St. Louis regional office. This paper also assisted VACO in the decision to decentralize Chapter 30 to the four regions discussed previously.

The management study on certification processing is being conducted by VACO's VR&E service staff. All aspects of monthly certification processing will be examined. These study results will help VACO decide if the Chapter 30 monthly certification processing should be automated. The advantages and disadvantages of monthly as opposed to semester certification will also be addressed. However, the study results are not expected until the latter part of this year.

External management studies for Chapter 30 have also become a priority for the VA. One study, currently being conducted by Booz, Allen, is an evaluation of the costs, benefits, and effectiveness of the optical disk technology. A second study focusing on revising the methodology for predicting the trainee rate for Chapter 30 is also being considered.

This chapter presented an overview of the Chapter 30 VA program operations. First, responsibilities of VACO for the Chapter 30 program were described. Second, the Chapter 30 benefits processing procedures were reviewed. Third, information dissemination activities were described. Finally, planned changes for the Chapter 30 program were presented.

III. EVALUATION FINDINGS

III. EVALUATION FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings from the evaluation of the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program. Evaluation criteria focused on whether the administration of the Chapter 30 program by the VA accomplished its intended objectives and whether it did so in an efficient, timely, and accurate manner.

As presented previously in the methodology section in Chapter I, evaluation criteria were developed to measure the effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program in meeting its benefits processing and information dissemination objectives. Data were then collected by the study team to measure the effectiveness of VA program operations in meeting these objectives. The study team then rated the level of effectiveness using a five-point scale ranging from "highly effective" (a rating of 5) to "not effective" (a rating of 1). To assist the reader, both the effectiveness terminology and the numbering scale is presented in the following discussion.

Exhibit III-1 summarizes the evaluation findings for the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program. The remainder of this chapter details these findings. First, the results of the evaluation of the VA's benefits processing are presented. Second, results from the evaluation of the information dissemination activities are presented.

1. WHILE SUBSTANTIALLY EFFECTIVE IN MEETING BENEFITS PROCESSING OBJECTIVES, THESE OBJECTIVES WERE NOT MET IN THE MOST OPTIMAL WAY

The results of the Booz, Allen evaluation show that the VA is substantially effective (rating of 4) in meeting benefits processing objectives. However, these benefits processing objectives were not met in the most timely or cost-efficient way.

Exhibit III-2 and the remainder of this section provide information to support this finding.

(1) The VA Is Highly Effective (rating of 5) In Verifying The Eligibility Of Veterans Who Apply For Chapter 30 Benefits

One of the primary objectives of the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program is to provide benefits to all eligible veterans who apply and are enrolled in an approved course of study. Eligibility requirements for the Chapter 30 program, established

Exhibit III-1
SUMMARY OF EFFECTIVENESS FINDINGS FOR VA'S CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM*

STUDY AREA	EFFECTIVENESS CRITERIA	RATING
Effectiveness in Meeting Intended Objectives for Benefits Processing	Extent to which the VA verifies the eligibility of veterans who apply for Chapter 30 benefits	●
	Extent to which the VA pays benefits to the veterans who have been found eligible	●
	Extent to which the VA monitors veterans who are receiving benefits to ensure they remain eligible	◕
	Accuracy of providing benefits	◕
	Time required to provide benefits	◔
	Cost of providing benefits	◔
Effectiveness in Meeting Intended Objectives for Information Dissemination	Extent to which the VA provides information to separatees on their Chapter 30 eligibility	◒
	Extent to which the VA provides information to veterans regarding application for Chapter 30 benefits	◒
	Extent to which the VA provides information to veterans regarding changes in the Chapter 30 program	◒
	Cost of providing information	◕
	Time required to provide information	◔
	Accuracy of providing information	◒

* Note: The Chapter 30 Optical Disk System costs were not included in this program evaluation.

Key: ○ Not Effective ◔ Somewhat Effective ◒ Effective ◕ Substantially Effective ● Highly Effective

Exhibit III-2 (1)
BENEFITS PROCESSING OBJECTIVES

Study Questions	Effectiveness Criteria	Level of Effectiveness	Supporting Evidence
1. Does the VA's Benefits Processing for the Chapter 30 Program Accomplish Intended Objectives?	- Extent to which the VA verifies the eligibility of veterans who apply for Chapter 30 benefits	●	- VA's benefits processing system verifies the eligibility of every veteran who applies for Chapter 30 benefits
	- Extent to which the VA pays benefits to the veterans who have been found eligible	●	- VA's benefits processing system ensures payment to all veterans who are eligible for Chapter 30 benefits and are enrolled in an approved school
	- Extent to which the VA monitors veterans who are receiving benefits to ensure they remain eligible	◕	- VA's monthly certification process requires veterans to report on their continued eligibility for Chapter 30 benefits - VA's administrative system requires schools to 1) certify veteran enrollment and 2) notify the VA of any change in enrollment status for veteran students - VA does not actively monitor the veterans or the schools to ensure reported data are accurate through Chapter 30 compliance surveys
2. Does the VA's Benefits Processing for the Chapter 30 Program Accomplish Intended Objectives in the Best Way Possible?	- Accuracy of providing benefits	◕	- Error rate for benefits processing for Chapter 30 is reported as less than that for other VA education benefit programs - Overpayments have been reduced due to monthly certification process and built-in accuracy checks in VA benefits processing system - VA does not have a system in place to monitor reserve status of veterans

Key: ○ Not Effective ◔ Somewhat Effective ◒ Effective ◕ Substantially Effective ● Highly Effective

78

Exhibit III-2 (2)
BENEFITS PROCESSING OBJECTIVES

Study Questions	Effectiveness Criteria	Level of Effectiveness	Supporting Evidence
2. Does the VA's Benefits Processing for the Chapter 30 Program Accomplish Intended Objectives in the Best Way Possible?	• Time required to provide benefits	◔	• Out of date and inaccurate data found in both the facility file and the DOD data base (DMDC) slows processing of payments • Monthly certification time cycle sends benefit checks to veterans in third week of month vs. first day • Processing of Chapter 30 benefits takes 3 days longer on average than other VA education benefits processing due to the complicated eligibility requirements of the legislation
	• Costs of providing benefits*	◔	• St. Louis Regional Office is consistently expending resources for overtime pay for staff • Other actual costs in St. Louis RO are less than planned costs due to an original overestimate in the budget • Unnecessary effort is expended in processing benefits due to the lack of an on-line, interactive facility file for all regional offices

* Note: Optical Disc system costs are not included in this analysis

Key:

○	◔	◒	◕	●
Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Substantially Effective	Highly Effective

through the Chapter 30 legislation and presented previously in Chapter I, must be met by the veteran to receive benefits. From our review of the eligibility verification process, we believe that the VA is highly effective (rating of 5) in meeting this objective.

Verification of eligibility for Chapter 30 benefits is ensured by three key elements of the benefits processing system used by the VA:

- A multi-faceted computer system
- A standard process
- A well-trained, two-tiered adjudication staff.

Each of these three elements are detailed below.

A multi-faceted computer system is used in the eligibility verification process. This system contains the following components:

- TARGET System--processes benefits and signals Treasury Department to mail payments to eligible veterans

- Prototype Optical Disk System--stores all contents of the veterans' claims folder including original application, school approval form, and other Chapter 30 correspondence using optical imaging technology

- DMDC Database--contains data on veteran's military service, high school graduate status, discharge date, and discharge status

- BIRLS Database--contains information on the veteran's service number, service type, discharge type, length of service, and type of benefit chosen

- Facility File--contains information on VA-approved schools and courses.

Interviews with VA staff revealed that, in some cases, DMDC database errors led to an improper delay of benefits to eligible veterans. However, as this database is the responsibility of the DOD, this eligibility verification problem has not affected the VA's rating in this area.

The standard process for eligibility verification, explained in detail in Chapter II, is summarized below. First, the adjudicator reviews the original application, the DD-214, the school, and course of study to ensure that the information conforms with the legislative requirements for eligibility. Information on the veteran is then verified on the TARGET screen with data from the DMDC database and the facility file. The adjudicator then determines if the applicant is eligible according to legislative requirements. The TARGET system edits the entries made by the adjudicator, displays the appropriate eligibility status, and moves the adjudicator to the proper disallowance and award screen. Once the adjudicator completes the award screen, the TARGET system generates the monthly benefit rate for the veteran. Finally, the senior claims examiner, or authorizer, validates the award amount determined by the adjudicator by further checking all eligibility data.

The third key element of the eligibility verification system used by the VA is the well-trained and experienced adjudication staff that understand the complexity of the eligibility requirements. A two-tiered staff of adjudicators and authorizers is used to check and doublecheck eligibility verification. Interview data revealed that Chapter 30 adjudicators are trained for a minimum of six months. Monthly training sessions are given by experienced adjudicators on specific eligibility requirements of Chapter 30 program. In addition, authorizers have at least six years of VA experience and begin at the GS level of 9-11.

In summary, the study team found that the process used by the VA to verify Chapter 30 eligibility information is highly effective (rating of 5).

(2) The VA Is Highly Effective (rating of 5) In Paying Benefits To The Veterans Who Have Been Found Eligible

A second VA objective for administering the Chapter 30 program is to pay benefits to eligible veterans. Our evaluation found that the VA's benefits processing system ensures payment to all eligible veterans who have applied for Chapter 30 benefits and are enrolled in an approved school with an approved course load.

As of January 1989, the VA has paid approximately $20,145,770 to eligible veterans under the Chapter 30 program, representing a total of 16,158 claims. The payment process, described in more detail in Chapter II, is summarized here. Following verification of eligibility, the award is automatically processed through the Hines Data Processing Center. This center prepares a voucher pay tape which is sent to a Treasury Department Disbursing Center. The payment check is processed by the Treasury Department and mailed to the veteran.

Review of records at the St. Louis regional office revealed that all claims from eligible veterans are paid in a timely fashion, with an average backlog between 4 to 8 days. In addition, interviews with staff in the Veterans Service Division in St. Louis revealed that no inquiries concerning the non-payment of awards have been received to date. Inquiries on payment problems have concerned the DOD kicker amounts and lateness of payment only.

In summary, the study team found that the VA has been highly effective (rating of 5) in paying Chapter 30 benefits to eligible veterans.

(3) The VA Is Substantially Effective (rating of 4) In Monitoring Veterans Who Are Receiving Benefits To Ensure They Remain Eligible

A third objective of the Chapter 30 program is to monitor eligible veterans to ensure that they remain eligible. We found that the VA is substantially effective (rating of 4) in meeting this objective.

To effectively monitor the veteran's eligibility, the VA must periodically ensure that:

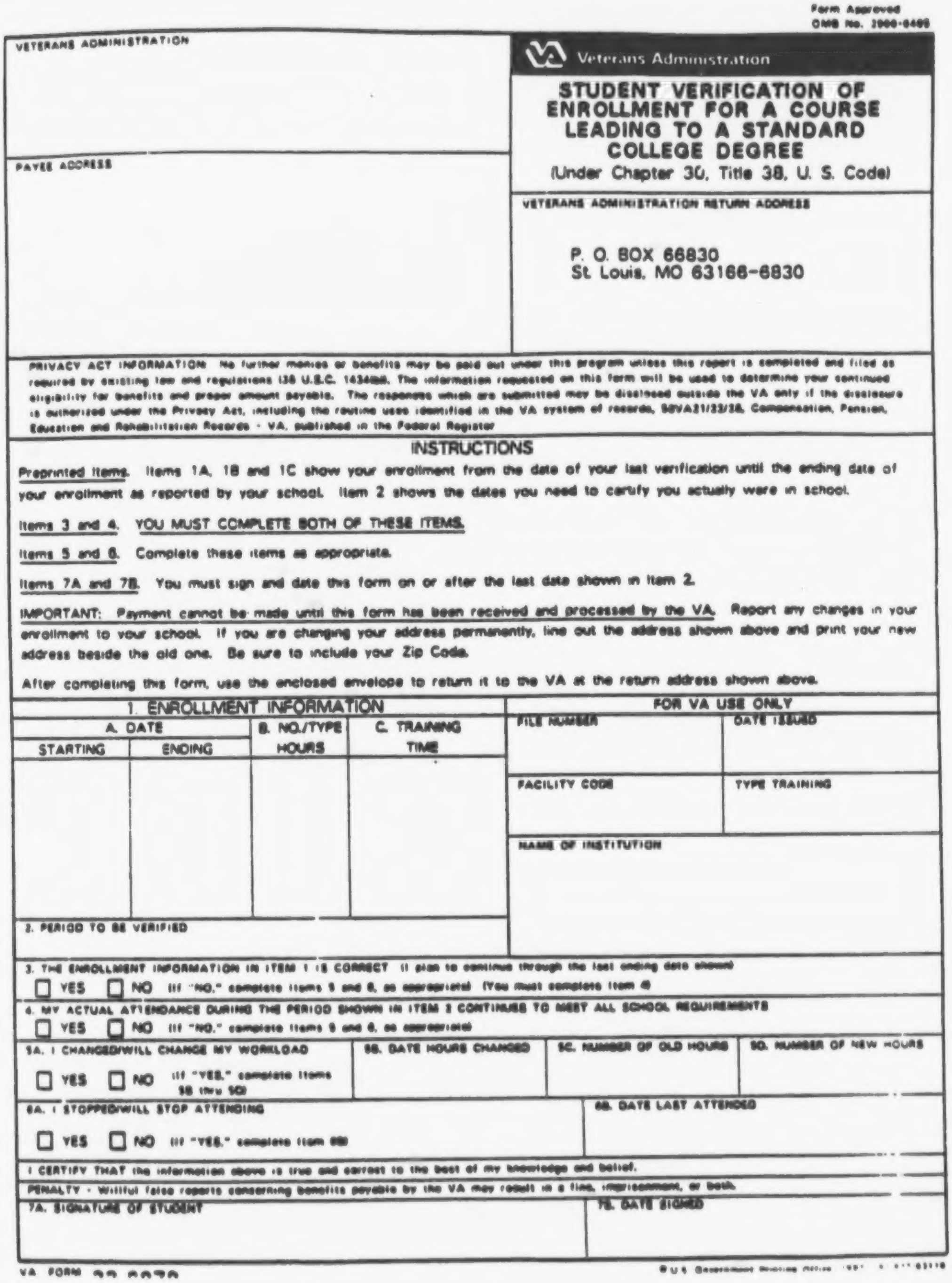
- The trainee is still enrolled in the same course and is pursuing the course at the same training time
- The trainee does not have excessive absences from the approved course of study (for non-college degree programs only).

The study team found that the VA is using two mechanisms to monitor veteran eligibility; the monthly certification process and an agreement system with schools offering approved courses.

The monthly certification is a form sent to the veteran on a monthly basis where the trainee is asked to verify enrollment dates and to record any absences for each month. An example of the enrollment certification form (VAF 22-8979) is shown in Exhibit III-3.

Schools are also required to notify the VA of any change in enrollment status of the trainees. This agreement requires that schools contact the VA immediately if a student drops out of a course, has

Exhibit III-3
ENROLLMENT CERTIFICATION FORM



Form Approved
OMB No. 2900-0465

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

PAYEE ADDRESS

Veterans Administration

STUDENT VERIFICATION OF ENROLLMENT FOR A COURSE LEADING TO A STANDARD COLLEGE DEGREE
(Under Chapter 30, Title 38, U. S. Code)

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION RETURN ADDRESS

P. O. BOX 66830
St. Louis, MO 63166-6830

PRIVACY ACT INFORMATION: No further monies or benefits may be paid out under this program unless this report is completed and filed as required by existing law and regulations (38 U.S.C. 1434(b)). The information requested on this form will be used to determine your continued eligibility for benefits and proper amount payable. The responses which are submitted may be disclosed outside the VA only if the disclosure is authorized under the Privacy Act, including the routine uses identified in the VA system of records, 58VA21/22/28, Compensation, Pension, Education and Rehabilitation Records - VA, published in the Federal Register

INSTRUCTIONS

Preprinted Items. Items 1A, 1B and 1C show your enrollment from the date of your last verification until the ending date of your enrollment as reported by your school. Item 2 shows the dates you need to certify you actually were in school.

Items 3 and 4. YOU MUST COMPLETE BOTH OF THESE ITEMS.

Items 5 and 6. Complete these items as appropriate.

Items 7A and 7B. You must sign and date this form on or after the last date shown in Item 2.

IMPORTANT: Payment cannot be made until this form has been received and processed by the VA. Report any changes in your enrollment to your school. If you are changing your address permanently, line out the address shown above and print your new address beside the old one. Be sure to include your Zip Code.

After completing this form, use the enclosed envelope to return it to the VA at the return address shown above.

1. ENROLLMENT INFORMATION			
A. DATE		B. NO./TYPE HOURS	C. TRAINING TIME
STARTING	ENDING		

2. PERIOD TO BE VERIFIED

FOR VA USE ONLY	
FILE NUMBER	DATE ISSUED
FACILITY CODE	TYPE TRAINING
NAME OF INSTITUTION	

3. THE ENROLLMENT INFORMATION IN ITEM 1 IS CORRECT (I plan to continue through the last ending date shown)
☐ YES ☐ NO (If "NO," complete items 5 and 6, as appropriate) (You must complete item 4)

4. MY ACTUAL ATTENDANCE DURING THE PERIOD SHOWN IN ITEM 2 CONTINUES TO MEET ALL SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS
☐ YES ☐ NO (If "NO," complete items 5 and 6, as appropriate)

5A. I CHANGED/WILL CHANGE MY WORKLOAD	5B. DATE HOURS CHANGED	5C. NUMBER OF OLD HOURS	5D. NUMBER OF NEW HOURS
☐ YES ☐ NO (If "YES," complete items 5B thru 5D)			

6A. I STOPPED/WILL STOP ATTENDING	6B. DATE LAST ATTENDED
☐ YES ☐ NO (If "YES," complete item 6B)	

I CERTIFY THAT the information above is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

PENALTY - Willful false reports concerning benefits payable by the VA may result in a fine, imprisonment, or both.

7A. SIGNATURE OF STUDENT	7B. DATE SIGNED

VA FORM [illegible]

U.S. Government Printing Office [illegible] prolonged absence from a course, or changes work-study status. In addition, Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) receive a monthly listing of students receiving Chapter 30 benefits from the Hines Data Processing Center. Schools are encouraged to report discrepancies between the monthly listing and the school records to the St. Louis office.

The Booz, Allen study team believes that these two methods are substantially effective in monitoring veteran eligibility. This system could be highly effective by the conduct of compliance surveys to assure that the reported information by the veteran and school is accurate.

In summary, the study team found that the VA is substantially effective (rating of 4) in monitoring veterans to ensure that they remain eligible for Chapter 30 benefits.

(4) The VA Is Substantially Effective (rating of 4) In Providing Chapter 30 Benefits Accurately To Trainees

A fourth objective of the VA's Chapter 30 program is to provide benefits in an accurate manner. To accomplish this objective, the VA must process benefits accurately with few overpayments. Evidence found during the evaluation led the study team to believe that the VA was substantially more effective (rating of 4) compared to other VA education programs in providing benefits accurately. This conclusion was based on the study finding that overpayments have been reduced due to the monthly certification process and built-in accuracy checks in the VA benefits processing system. However, lack of monitoring of veteran reserve status reduces the accuracy of benefits processing. These study findings are detailed below.

While statistics on the Chapter 30 program were not available, interview data revealed that two key program elements have reduced overpayments:

- Monthly certification process
- Built-in accuracy checks in VA benefits processing system.

Legislation permits the VA to use monthly certifications of attendance for students attending degree-granting programs under Chapter 30. Other VA education programs have used semi-annual certifications of attendance for degree-granting programs. The monthly certification process provides a means of more frequent monitoring of changes in trainee enrollment. As awards are contingent on receipt of monthly certifications, overpayments usually occur for only one-month time periods. This compares favorably with the six-month potential overpayment period that occurred with the semiannual certification method used for other VA programs.

Accuracy is also ensured by the VA benefits processing system that has built-in accuracy checks and an on-line accounting system. Interviews with VA staff revealed that accuracy checks have been built in to the Cobol code prepared for the TARGET system. The TARGET system programming that enhances accuracy includes:

- An award amount schedule
- An on-line account balance check.

The award schedule is based on the predetermined award amount according to length of service and other variables and kicker amounts, if applicable. The award amount schedule calculates the award amount for the veteran according to information entered into the system by the adjudicator. The on-line account balance checks for negative account balances due to overpayments or other reasons. If a negative account balance is found, no additional benefits are awarded to that veteran until the negative account balance is removed.

The study team found that the VA is not currently monitoring the reserve status of trainees in the Selected Reserve. Legislation mandates that reservists are eligible for Chapter 30 benefits under the "2 by 4" program (see Chapter I). These reservists must maintain their reserve status for four years following their two years of active service to be eligible for full benefits. If the Chapter 30 veteran who is receiving full benefits drops from the reserves under circumstances that negate "2 by 4" program entitlement, he or she may still qualify for Chapter 30 based on completion of 2 years of continuous duty. However, the veteran's award is reduced by $50 to $250 per month. Therefore, lack of monitoring of reserve status could result in overpayments of $50 per month for these veterans. Interviews with VA officials revealed that this problem was recognized in 1985 and the VA is currently working to improve monitoring of veteran reserve status. Plans to be implemented by FY90 include the addition of reserve status to the Chapter 30 DMDC database. No plans to monitor reserve status through the monthly certification process have been made.

These evaluation findings lead the study team to believe that the VA is substantially effective (rating of 4) in accurately providing Chapter 30 benefits to eligible veterans.

(5) Timeliness of Benefits Processing is Not Optimal

Evaluation findings indicate that the benefits for Chapter 30 are not provided by the VA in the most timely and cost-efficient manner. Supporting evidence for this statement is provided in the following section.

Evaluation findings revealed that the VA was somewhat effective (rating of 2) in providing Chapter 30 benefits in a timely way. Three areas of program weakness were identified as contributing to this finding:

- Complicated eligibility requirements lengthens Chapter 30 processing time

- Inaccuracies and inconsistencies found in two databases used for Chapter 30 benefits processing slowed payment of benefits

- Monthly certification process modifies typical VA benefit payment cycle.

Each of these three weaknesses is explained in more detail below.

Evaluation findings showed that processing of a Chapter 30 claim takes three days longer on average than processing of other VA education benefit programs. Interview data revealed that this increase in processing time is due to the complexity of the eligibility requirements for the Chapter 30 program. An overview of the process required to verify these complex eligibility requirements was presented previously in Exhibit II-4, Chapter 30 Original Claims Process. In addition, if future legislative changes increase the complexity of eligibility for Chapter 30, this timeliness problem will increase.

Evaluation findings also showed that the facility file database used for adjudicating Chapter 30 claims contains out of date and inaccurate school and course approval data that slowed benefit processing. To compensate for this data problem, St. Louis regional office staff contact the regional office with jurisdiction for that school to obtain accurate and current information. This process delays payment of benefits.

Inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the DMDC database result in an additional source of delay in benefit processing. Study results showed that adjudication of approximately forty-five cases, or 7%, per week is postponed due to inaccurate or conflicting information contained in this database. The adjudication staff spends much time verifying inconsistent data in the database. St. Louis adjudication staff currently send a listing of inaccuracies to the DOD for correction. As appropriate, benefits are not paid to these veterans until the errors are corrected. However, interview data reveal that these errors take up to six months to correct.

Timeliness of benefits processing is also adversely affected by the monthly certification process. Most VA benefit programs are set up so that the payment reaches the veteran on the first of the month. However, due to the monthly certifications, the Chapter 30 benefit check usually reaches the veteran during the third week of the month. Survey data showed that this different monthly schedule caused some difficulties for veterans who were not aware of this difference among VA benefit programs.

(6) The VA Is Somewhat Effective (rating of 2) In Processing Chapter 30 Benefits In A Cost-Efficient Manner[2]

Evaluation findings showed that the VA is only somewhat effective (rating of 2) in processing benefits in a cost-efficient manner. The study team used two types of information to judge the effectiveness of the VA in meeting this objective. This information included:

- Actual costs versus planned costs
- Duplication of effort.

Data on cost of producting end products for Chapter 30 vs. other VA educational assistance programs were not used to judge the effectiveness of meeting this objective as Chapter 30 legislation increases the difficulty of processing claims.

Data on general operating expenses expended in the St. Louis regional office showed that actual costs have exceeded planned costs. Overtime pay for staff has been incurred since the first quarter in FY 1988 and has increased steadily as shown in Exhibit III-4. These overtime costs correspond to 0.4, 0.4, 3.7, 6.7, and 7.6 FTEE for each quarter shown in Exhibit III-4, respectively. Interviews with VA management revealed that this overtime is being paid to adjudication staff who are working overtime to ensure that Chapter 30 benefits are paid in a timely fashion to veterans. This overtime has been necessary due to the fact that rapidly increasing workload has not been matched with appropriate staff and adequate access to necessary computer hardware and software. Interviews also revealed that the anticipated optical disk system modifications may provide some relief to this problem.

---

[2] Cost issues related to the Optical Disc prototype system were not included in this analysis.

Exhibit III-4
CHAPTER 30 OVERTIME EXPENDITURES AT ST. LOUIS RO (FY88-89)

QUARTER	FY 88 1st quarter	FY 88 2nd quarter	FY 88 3rd quarter	FY 88 4th quarter	FY 89 1st quarter
AMOUNT OF CHAPTER 30 OVERTIME	$1,865	$2,036	$18,633	$33,418	$38,100

Interview data also revealed that, while overtime is occurring at St. Louis, the overall general operating expense budget for St. Louis has not been exceeded. This is due to an original overestimate in the general operating expense budget for the Chapter 30 program at St. Louis.

A second problem with cost-efficiency of benefits processing is duplication of effort. This duplication is occurring due to the lack of current and complete data on approved schools and courses. Currently, a centralized facility file is maintained by the ELR in the St. Louis regional office. This file, available both in hardcopy and on optical disk, contains information on approved schools and courses. ELRs from other regional offices periodically send updated information to St. Louis. However, a lack of consistency in both the formats used by the ELRs and the extent of information sent causes difficulty in maintaining this database. Lack of updated and complete information on the schools translates into duplication of effort as the Chapter 30 adjudicators must contact regional offices for this updated information.

This section presented information on the VA's effectiveness in meeting its benefits processing objectives.

2. THE VA IS GENERALLY EFFECTIVE IN MEETING ITS INFORMATION DISSEMINATION OBJECTIVES

The results of the Booz, Allen evaluation show that the VA is generally effective (rating of 3) in meeting its information dissemination objectives. Exhibit III-5 and the remainder of this section provide information to support this general finding.

(1) The VA Has Been Generally Effective (rating of 3) In Providing Information To Separatees On Their Chapter 30 Eligibility

In order for the Chapter 30 program to be effective, the VA must provide information to separatees[3] on their eligibility. Study findings revealed that the VA provides this type of information on both a proactive and reactive basis.

Proactive information dissemination activities regarding separatee eligibility occurs in three ways:

- Distribution of VADS package
- Distribution of Chapter 30 flyer
- Lectures and other outreach efforts.

Currently, the VA provides information to the separatee on general VA education benefits through a series of mailings called the VADS (Veterans Assistance Discharge System) package. The VADS package, described in detail in Chapter II, has two mailings to the separatee as follows:

- One month after discharge--containing 1) general information on all veteran benefits and 2) a card pre-addressed to the local RO for the separatee to request more information on a number of topics, including Chapter 30.

- Six months after discharge--containing a pamphlet with more specific information on veterans benefits, including Chapter 30.

Three weaknesses existed with the VADS package. First, the Chapter 30-specific information included in the VADS package does not contain up-to-date information

---

[3] The term "separatee" is the term given to the serviceperson at the point of being discharged from military service.

Exhibit III-5 (1)
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION OBJECTIVES

Study Questions	Effectiveness Criteria	Level of Effectiveness	Supporting Evidence
1. Does the VA's Dissemination of Information on the Chapter 30 Program Accomplish Intended Objectives?	• Extent to which the VA provides information to separatees on their Chapter 30 eligibility	◒	• VA proactively provides information on general VA benefits to separatees through VADS package and lectures at military bases and schools • VA reactively provides information to separatees through inquiry services provided at VACO and the regional office network and veterans counselors at academic institutions
	• Extent to which the VA provides information to veterans regarding application for Chapter 30 benefits	◒	• VA provides information on applying for Chapter 30 benefits through the VADS package, VA Inquiry Service, and veterans counselors at academic institutions • Written instructions to veterans on applying for Chapter 30 benefits could be improved by adding details on VA mandatory processing time for award and monthly certification forms
	• Extent to which the VA provides information to veterans regarding changes in the Chapter 30 program	◒	• Written information on changes in Chapter 30 are routinely prepared by the VA through regulations, circulars, and procedures manuals that are distributed VA-wide • Education Liaison Representatives (ELRs) routinely provide information to schools on changes in Chapter 30 • No information on changes in Chapter 30 is provided directly to veterans
2. Does the VA's Dissemination of Information on the Chapter 30 Program Accomplish Intended Objectives in the Best Way Possible?	• Cost of providing information	◕	• Actual costs for information dissemination appear to be consistent with planned costs • Some duplication of effort exists in processing inquiries in a decentralized manner through regional offices while benefits are processed centrally through one regional office

Key: ○ Not Effective ◔ Somewhat Effective ◒ Effective ◕ Substantially Effective ● Highly Effective

Exhibit III-5 (2)
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION OBJECTIVES

Study Questions	Effectiveness Criteria	Level of Effectiveness	Supporting Evidence
2. Does the VA's Dissemination of Information on the Chapter 30 Program Accomplish Intended Objectives in the Best Way Possible?	• Time required to provide information	◔	• Inquiry response time standard is met or exceeded at VACO and most regional offices • Lengthy 62 day average is required for VACO to produce, approve, and distribute new information on Chapter 30
	• Accuracy of providing information	◒	• All VA written information on Chapter 30 is accurate at date of release • Changes in the Chapter 30 legislation are not always reflected in material distributed to vets • Telephone responses to inquiries have a high accuracy rate at the St. Louis regional office while other regional offices are less accurate

Key: ○ Not Effective ◔ Somewhat Effective ◒ Effective ◕ Substantially Effective ● Highly Effective on the Chapter 30 program. New eligibility requirements have not yet been incorporated in materials sent out through the VADS package. Second, interviews with VA management revealed that the receipt of the mailing by the separatee is questionable. If the address changes or is incorrect, there is no way for the VA to update or change the mailing lists. Third, the VADS does not have a mechanism to identify or contact those veterans who would be eligible for Chapter 30 program benefits.

Interview data also revealed that the VA provides Chapter 30 informational flyers to the DOD for distribution to separatees at each of the 1,700 DOD service discharge points. However, no information is currently available on the actual distribution of these flyers.

Interviews with VA staff also revealed that VA personnel are providing lectures to servicepersons on Chapter 30 benefits on a limited basis. Other outreach efforts include a broad public service campaign on VA education benefits in general and a veteran "question and answer" column providing syndicated information on benefits, including Chapter 30, to newspapers.

Reactive information dissemination activities for VA's Chapter 30 program occurs when separatees contact the VA for information. Fifty-eight regional offices are available to the separatee to call, write, or personally visit for specific information. Results from the Booz, Allen survey of regional offices revealed that currently, the regional offices are each receiving 27 requests on average per week for specific information on Chapter 30.

In summary we found that the VA's provision of Chapter 30-specific information to separatees is generally effective (rating of 3)

(2) The VA Has Been Effective (rating of 3) In Providing Information To Veterans Regarding Their Application For Chapter 30 Benefits

The VA uses three methods to provide information to veterans on their application for Chapter 30 benefits. These methods are:

- VADS package
- VA inquiry service
- Veteran benefit counselor at schools.

As discussed previously, the VADS package has a two-part mailing that is sent to veterans. The first mailing contains a mail-back card that the veteran can use to request an application for Chapter 30 benefits. The second mailing of the VADS package contains instructions for the veteran to contact his local Regional Office for a Chapter 30 application.

The second method by which the VA makes information on Chapter 30 applications available to the veteran is through the VA inquiry service. This service responds to inquiries from veterans regarding Chapter 30 applications. A one-page flyer and a Chapter 30 application form are routinely sent to these inquirers.

The third method available to veterans for learning about Chapter 30 application requirements is through the veteran benefits counselors available at schools. These counselors are available to provide the veteran with information as well as to assist the veteran in applying for Chapter 30 benefits. These counselors, while not VA employees, act as extension agents to the VA inquiry system.

One area identified during the evaluation that lessened the VA's effectiveness in meeting this objective is the lack of clearly written, easy-to-use data to the veteran regarding the actual completion of the Chapter 30 application and certification of attendance forms. In addition, information is not provided to veterans regarding the delayed time schedule for Chapter 30 benefits due to the monthly certification process. Addition of this information would improve VA effectiveness in this area.

(3) The VA Has Been Effective (rating of 3) In Providing Information To Veterans Regarding Changes In The Chapter 30 Program

The VA has two methods of making information available to veterans on changes in the Chapter 30 program that include:

- VA inquiry service
- Veteran benefit counselor at schools.

The VA makes information on changes to the Chapter 30 program available to the veteran through the VA inquiry service. This service responds to inquiries from veterans regarding Chapter 30 changes as presented in Chapter II. The service is provided with circulars produced by VACO that explain legislative, regulatory, and procedural changes to the Chapter 30 program and are therefore kept updated on the program.

The second method available to veterans for learning about changes to the Chapter 30 program is through the veteran benefits counselors available at schools. These counselors are provided with current information on the Chapter 30 program through the education liaison representatives (ELRs) available at the regional offices. The ELRs are kept updated on changes to Chapter 30 through circulars provided by VACO.

Evaluation findings revealed that no information on Chapter 30 program changes are provided directly to the veteran. This information dissemination activity would increase the VA's effectiveness in meeting this objective.

(4) VA's Chapter 30 Information Dissemination Efforts Are Substantially Efficient (rating of 4)

The study team used two types of information to judge the effectiveness of the VA in meeting its objective to deliver information on Chapter 30 in a cost-effective manner. Indicators included:

- Planned costs versus actual costs
- Identified duplication of effort.

The study team was unable to locate any data on the planned costs for information dissemination activities for the Chapter 30 program. However, general operating expense data from the St. Louis regional office revealed that no overtime is occurring for the Veterans Services Division in responding to inquiries. In addition, data collected from the Booz, Allen regional office survey revealed that a similar level of effort was being expended to respond to Congressional and telephonic inquiries for Chapter 30 as for other education programs.

Evaluation efforts revealed that two types of duplication of effort resulted from the decentralized inquiry processing system coexisting with a centralized processing system. First, interview data showed that regional offices often contacted the St. Louis regional office for information on the Chapter 30 program that was already available to them through VACO circulars. Second, St. Louis regional office staff contacted other regional offices for information on schools in their respective jurisdiction. While information is available to St. Louis staff through a facility file, these data are often abbreviated and out-of-date.

(5) The VA Is Somewhat Effective (rating of 2) In Disseminating Information In A Timely Manner

The study team found three key program outcomes, both positive and negative, that led to this finding:

- The Veterans Service Division in St. Louis has improved inquiry response time for Chapter 30 as compared to other VA education benefit program inquiries
- Inquiry response time at VACO and regional offices other than St. Louis meets time standards
- VACO publications on Chapter 30 are not released in a timely fashion.

These three findings are detailed below.

Program statistics from the Veterans Service Division (VSD) in St. Louis showed that the average response time for all Chapter 30 inquiries is 2.5 days as compared to a ten-day average for other education program inquiries. Interviews with VSD staff revealed that the optical disk prototype system allows for faster access to information used to respond to these inquiries.

Statistics from the Booz, Allen regional office survey revealed that response times for Chapter 30 inquiries meet the set time standards. In addition, the response times are similar to those for other education benefit programs.

In addition, data from VACO showed that 82% of telephone inquiries are responded to within one day. 100% of written inquiries are completed within the set time standard of thirty days.

The key weakness identified in the timeliness of information disseminated by the VA on Chapter 30 is related to the long average time period required by VACO to produce new publications. VACO is responsible for publishing three types of information on Chapter 30:

- Circulars
- Procedural manuals
- General information flyers and pamphlets.

Interviews with VACO staff showed that 62 days are required, on average, to produce, approve, and distribute Chapter 30 circulars. Circulars not requiring VA General Counsel concurrence take an average of 39 days while circulars requiring this concurrence take an average of 127 days prior to distribution. Study findings show that two circulars on the recent legislation passed in November 1988 were immediately drafted but were not approved and distributed until March 23, 1989. Interview data showed that, during this interim period, the St. Louis regional office developed their own interpretations of the recent changes in the eligibility requirements in order to be able to respond in a timely way to process benefits.

The procedures manual produced by VBA contains the formal instructions on processing benefits and other procedures. Interview data showed that the VA is projecting a January 1990 date for incorporation of Chapter 30 procedures, approximately four years subsequent to institution of the program.

The VACO is also responsible for preparing information flyers and pamphlets on the Chapter 30 program. These materials are distributed through the VADS package discussed earlier and in response to inquiries. The study team found, however, that none of these materials that are currently being distributed have incorporated information on the new legislation passed in November 1988.

(6) The VA Is Effective (rating of 3) In Disseminating Accurate Information

Evaluation findings showed that the VA is generally effective (rating of 3) in disseminating accurate information on the Chapter 30 program. The study team found three key findings that led to this conclusion:

- All written information prepared by VACO is accurate at the date of release
- St. Louis VSD reports a high accuracy rate for inquiry responses
- Accuracy rate for inquiry responses from other regional offices is variable and is lower than the St. Louis accuracy rate.

These three findings are discussed in more detail below.

VACO has produced circulars and general information materials on Chapter 30. Review of these materials shows that all of the information presented in these documents is accurate at the date of release. Interview data show that this high accuracy rate is accomplished through the extensive review and approval cycle that includes VBA and VA staff offices including legal counsel.

Statistics from the VSD service in the St. Louis regional office showed that the error rate for telephone inquiries on Chapter 30 is 8%. This error rate is lower than that for other education programs. Interview data reveal that familiarity with the Chapter 30 program due to the high volume of inquiries to this regional office has contributed to the low error rate. The St. Louis regional office currently receives 212 inquiries per week on Chapter 30. In addition, VSD staff training efforts on Chapter 30, averaging seventeen hours per month, appear to contribute to this low error rate.

Interview data with VA management revealed that an earlier study showed a higher average error rate for Chapter 30 inquiry responses from other regional offices. Lack of training and a low volume of Chapter 30 inquiries appear to be contributing factors to this higher average error rate. The Booz, Allen regional office survey showed that, of the 53 offices responding to this question, an average of 3.5 hours are spent per month in training for Chapter 30. In addition, an average of 72 inquiries for Chapter 30 are received weekly by each regional office other than St. Louis.

In summary, this section showed that the VA is generally effective (rating of 3) in meeting its information dissemination objectives.

IV. PROCESS ASSESSMENT

IV. PROCESS ASSESSMENT

This chapter presents findings from an assessment of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) administration of the All-Volunteer Force Education Assistance Program. The purpose of the assessment was to identify Chapter 30 program strengths and weaknesses that are related to problems and successes identified in the previous chapter.

The process assessment, described in detail in Chapter I, addressed four key characteristics of the Chapter 30 program:

- Organization--Addressing roles and responsibilities of VACO and VBA regional office staff assigned to implement and manage the program, including decision making roles
- Tools and Information--Addressing instruments and data provided to Chapter 30 program staff for carrying out their responsibilities including the benefits processing computer system, Chapter 30 circulars, and procedural manuals
- Staff Expertise--Addressing the experience, skills, and knowledge of Chapter 30 program staff
- Process--Addressing approaches and procedures used to carry out the Chapter 30 program activities such as the inquiry and benefit processing methodologies.

Findings and conclusions from our assessment are presented in the following sections of this chapter. The first section contains information on program strengths while the second section describes program weaknesses.

1. THE VA'S EFFORTS REGARDING ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM ARE FOCUSED ON BENEFITS PROCESSING AT ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

As described in Chapter I, one of the VA's primary objectives regarding the administration of the Chapter 30 program is the processing of benefits. The outcome evaluation in Chapter III revealed that the VA was highly effective in meeting the benefits processing objectives. Process assessment findings revealed that this program success is attributable to solid planning and accurate implementation of the benefits processing system and procedures done by VACO managers. In addition, the high level of staff expertise and dedication at the St. Louis regional office contributed to program effectiveness in this area. These two findings are discussed below.

(1) Well-Planned And Implemented Benefits Processing System And Procedures Contributed To The VA's Success In Meeting Benefit Processing Objectives

VACO program managers' planning and implementation of the benefits processing system were key elements of initial program success. This benefits processing system has several key components which led to highly effective Chapter 30 benefits processing. These components include:

- TARGET software accounting procedures
- TARGET software data processing procedures
- Filenet software workflow management capabilities
- Optical disk file access capabilities
- Standard procedures for Chapter 30 benefits processing as defined in VBA circulars.

Each of these key components is described below.

TARGET software accounting procedures contributed to the effectiveness of the VA in meeting benefits processing objectives through the ability to conduct timely testing of veteran accounting balances prior to payment. This procedure is part of the TARGET software code and was first developed for the Chapter 30 processing. The on-line accounting edits perform the accounting formula checks in an on-line mode to assure the accuracy of each transaction resulting in the proper update of the master record and payment. These edits also stop invalid transactions, thus preventing the numerous out-of-balances in the accounting batch system that plague other systems. This innovative procedure results in more accurate and efficient transactions.

Chapter 30 TARGET software with on-line data processing capabilities also contributed to this program strength. On-line processing of claims improves the timeliness of the system. Batch processing, used by the seven other VA benefits processing software programs, processes all cases adjudicated during one day overnight and any problem cases bring the entire batch processing to a halt. This problem is then corrected during the next working day and the entire batch must be rerun the next evening. Chapter 30 TARGET processing, however, is done on-line which allows the system to notify an adjudicator immediately regarding this type of problem and have the problem corrected.

A third key component of the benefits processing system planned by VACO management is the vastly improved ability of the adjudication division chief to manage workflow through the system. This workflow management capability, a characteristic of the Filenet software, allows the adjudication division chief to allocate cases to adjudicators depending on priorities and anticipated workload. This translates into more efficient and effective adjudication of benefits claims by the St. Louis regional office. When the system potential to accurately count and evaluate workload is fully realized, this characteristic will have a favorable effect on program effectiveness.

The optical disk prototype's improved ability to access veteran folders is a fourth important characteristic of the benefits processing system that contributed to the VA's ability to meet its benefits processing objectives in a highly effective manner. Three important characteristics of the optical disk system that contribute to program success include:

- The ability to access veteran folders immediately instead of using the administrative division staff to locate, pull, and deliver files

- The security and integrity of the data

- The ability for more than one staff person (i.e., adjudicators and veterans benefits counselors) to observe veteran information at one time.

These three characteristics of the optical disk system greatly improve the ability of the VA to meet its benefits processing objectives in a highly effective manner.

The fifth characteristic of the benefits processing system that led to program success in this area involves the extensive effort by VACO staff to define and describe procedures to be followed in the VA's implementation of the Chapter 30 program. These procedures were distributed throughout the VA using hardcopy circulars. Chapter 30 circulars published to date include:

- DVB Circular 22-85-6--contains general information on Chapter 30, including legislation and eligibility; benefit payment information; approved training types; and program administrative information. Subsequent revisions added information on TARGET and fiscal processing. Appendices A through J were subsequently published that contain a large amount of VA-specific information on Chapter 30 procedures.

- DVB Circular 22-87-4--contains detailed information on DOD Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) database inquiry procedures.

- DVB Circular 20-87-7--includes information on provision of the Veterans Benefits Improvement and Health-Care Authorization Act of 1986 that relate to VA education benefits programs.

- DVB Circular 22-88-16--details procedures regarding the verification of benefits payments to the Hines Data Processing Center (DPC).

In addition, two circulars are currently in draft form that describe procedural changes due to the recent changes to the Chapter 30 legislation (PL 100-689). These are:

- VBA Circular 20-89-10--summarizes the legislative changes and describes procedural changes affecting all stations.

- VBA Circular 20-89-10, Appendix B--provides special procedures for the St. Louis adjudication division for implementing the Chapter 30 provisions of PL 100-689.

These circulars provide consistent instructions to all VA central and regional office staff in implementing the Chapter 30 program.

(2) The High Level Of Staff Expertise And Training At St. Louis Helped To Achieve Benefits Processing Objectives

The process assessment also revealed that the staff expertise and training at the St. Louis regional office contributed to the success of the VA in meeting its Chapter 30 benefits processing objectives. Interviews with these staff members revealed a high degree of knowledge regarding the Chapter 30 legislation and VA procedures. In-house training for Chapter 30 was conducted by a full-time Chapter 30 training specialist out of the adjudication division. Staff dedication to processing payments and to providing the best possible service to the veteran was evident in the St. Louis regional office. In addition, quickly-developed staff expertise in using the new prototype system to process large numbers of education benefits claims was a contributor to program success in the benefits processing area.

2. WEAKNESSES IN THE VA'S ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM RESULT FROM LACK OF ATTENTION IN THREE PROGRAM AREAS

Process assessment activities also identified program components that were linked to weaknesses found in the outcome evaluation described in Chapter III. Problems were identified in the following three program areas as a result of this assessment:

- Selected aspects of VACO management of the Chapter 30 program
- Two aspects of program operations
- Efforts aimed at orienting Chapter 30 staff to the program.

The following sections discuss these findings from the process assessment.

(1) Selected Aspects of VACO Management Of The Chapter 30 Program Led To Program Inefficiencies

As discussed in the previous section, VACO management activities, such as planning and evaluation, initially focused on the processing of Chapter 30 benefits at the St. Louis Regional Office and were responsible for initial program success. However, three specific elements of VACO management led to program inefficiencies. These three areas are:

- Lack of management information for program planning, monitoring, and evaluation
- Less than optimal communications and coordination between VA and DOD
- Lack of clear lines of programmatic responsibility among VACO VBA staff.

These three areas are discussed in the paragraphs below.

Study findings showed that the lack of management information for program planning, monitoring, and evaluation reduced the effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program in meeting its objectives. Interviews with Chapter 30 program staff revealed that a management information system for the VA's administration of Chapter 30 has neither been defined nor implemented to date. Evidence of development, implementation, and refinement of a management information system for Chapter 30 would include:

- Development of Chapter 30-specific program goals and objectives
- Development of yearly action steps for meeting objectives and development of goals and related data indicators for tracking progress
- Determination and implementation of data collection methods for collecting information on indicators
- Refinement of program objectives, action steps, and operations.

Interviews with VACO staff revealed that, while VBA-wide goals and objectives exist, Chapter 30-specific goals, objectives, and action steps have never been developed for the VA. Consequently, the Chapter 30 management information system framework is also nonexistent. Due to the lack of up-front planning in this specific area, management information has been gathered in a relatively unsophisticated, ad hoc manner to date.

The Booz, Allen study team identified three key types of management information that is not being collected currently:

- Information on indicators to track progress on VA goals, objectives, or action plans
- Information on total costs expended by the VA on Chapter 30 including Chapter 30-specific FTEE at VACO and all ROs
- Information on activities conducted at CO including number and types of Congressional inquiries responded to by Congressional liaison and other VACO offices.

While this program weakness was identified during our evaluation of the Chapter 30 program, interviews revealed that this lack of management information was perceived by VACO and concerted efforts were being made to gather this information in a more systematic, standard way.

The second weakness identified in the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program involves communications between the VA and the Department of Defense (DOD). The outcome evaluation findings, presented previously in Chapter III, revealed several areas of program inefficiency that involved both the VA and the DOD. These areas included:

- Lack of coordination between DOD and VA in the provision of Chapter 30 benefits information to separatees
- Inaccuracy of the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) database used by the VA to determine eligibility of veterans for Chapter 30 benefits
- Lack of DOD-VA communication to the veteran regarding the variability of "kicker" amounts to the veteran.

Each of these areas is discussed in more detail below.

The provision of information on Chapter 30 benefits for servicepersons leaving the service is provided by the DOD during debriefings. Interview data indicated that this information is provided in varying degrees of thoroughness by the DOD depending on the location of the debriefing. Information on Chapter 30 benefits is also provided by the VA for new separatees through their Veterans Administration Discharge System (VADS) package. This package, sent to all veterans, contains general information on all veterans benefits. However, our study showed that no coordination occurs between the DOD and VA in coordinating or complementing these two efforts.

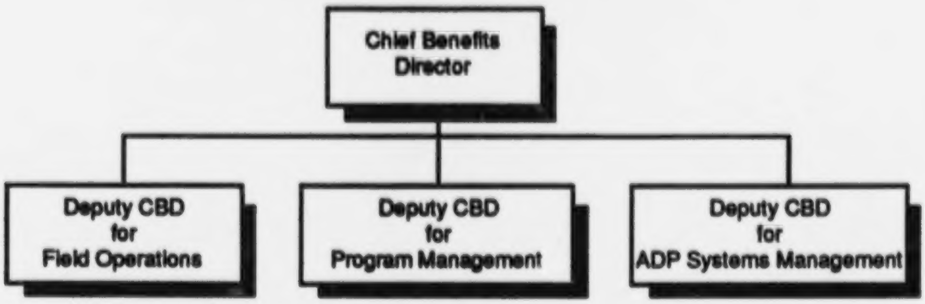
A second area where lack of VA-DOD coordination caused program inefficiency involves the DMDC database. This database, compiled by the DOD and accessed by the VA during adjudication of Chapter 30 claims, provides information on service records of veterans including eligibility and other information. Information gathered during our study indicated that approximately 40 to 50 errors per week are found in the DMDC by adjudicators in the St. Louis office while they are adjudicating claims for Chapter 30 benefits. In addition, these 40 to 50 errors, representing approximately 10% of the Chapter 30 adjudication claims, are serious enough to warrant correspondence to the DOD and thus delay the processing of the particular claim until the DMDC problem is resolved. This causes serious time delays in the processing of veteran claims. Interviews with VA staff indicate that, while this problem has been discussed with the DOD, no resolution of the issue has occurred. Recent progress made by the VA in working with DOD on other database issues lends support to the belief that this specific issue can also be resolved.

The third area where lack of VA and DOD coordination led to program ineffectiveness involved the payment of the DOD "kicker" to veterans. This "kicker" amount, added automatically to the Chapter 30 benefit by the TARGET system, often varies from the amount that the veteran is expecting. This variability, due to DOD policy, causes confusion by the veterans regarding their benefit payment. This confusion leads to a high volume of inquiries to the ROs, VACO, and Congress regarding Chapter 30 benefits amounts.

Interviews with VACO staff revealed that VA-DOD meetings were held quarterly or more frequently to deal with joint VA-DOD program issues. These interviews also indicated that much progress had been made in solving problems encountered by the VA in administering programs jointly with the DOD. However, our study indicates that these three areas are causing ineffectiveness and inefficiency in the VA administration of the Chapter 30 program and, as the program increases in size, these problems will become major obstacles to the effective administration of this program.

Finally, lack of clear programmatic roles and responsibilities within VACO led to some program inefficiency. In VACO, the VBA has clear lines of administrative responsibilities. These administrative divisions, presented previously in Chapter II, are shown in Exhibit IV-1.

Exhibit IV-1
VACO VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION
ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION


Chief Benefits Director
Deputy CBD for Field Operations
Deputy CBD for Program Management
Deputy CBD for ADP Systems Management

Chapter 30 program responsibilities cross these administrative lines, however. Interviews with staff from these divisions revealed the following Chapter 30 roles and responsibilities:

- Office of the Chief Benefits Director--overall responsibility for Chapter 30 including centralization/decentralization decision
- Office of the DCBD for Field Operations--responsible for ensuring appropriate FTEE budgetary resources are available for the St. Louis RO
- Office of the DCBD for ADP Systems Management--responsible for computer hardware and software decisions
- Office of the DCBD for Program Management--each section within this office has specific responsibilities for different aspects of the Chapter 30 program operations.

More detail on these responsibilities was presented in Chapter II.

This administrative structure works well for the management of established, on-going programs but lacks the needed flexibility for implementation of a new or rapidly changing program. Lack of clearly defined programmatic responsibilities for Chapter 30 led to program problems in three areas:

- Lack of coordination between VACO VBA offices regarding Chapter 30 planning and evaluation activities.

- Inability for quick response to requests from the field for programmatic decisions regarding changes or increases in procedures, equipment, staffing, and other program elements.

- Excessive effort expended by ROs in determining assigned VACO Chapter 30 program responsibilities.

These program problems, while not major in nature due to the small size of the current Chapter 30 program, will increase proportionately with the growing Chapter 30 program. Continued absence of a Chapter 30 program organization chart that overlays the administrative structure of VACO with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for Chapter 30 will continue to contribute to program inefficiencies.

(2) Problems Found In Two Internal Information Sources Contributed To Program Ineffectiveness

Two internal sources of information used in Chapter 30 processing were identified during the process assessment as contributing to the program weaknesses identified during the outcome evaluation described in Chapter III. These two information systems are:

- Facility file
- Circulars and procedural manuals.

Problems identified with these two internal information sources are described in detail below.

The St. Louis facility file, described in Chapter II, contains information on Chapter 30 schools including approved programs, signature information, and other data. This file is maintained both in hardcopy and on optical disk and is used by adjudicators in this RO to process Chapter 30 claims. Four problems exist with this database:

- Records for each school are not adequately standardized

- Inadequate database management capabilities of the current optical disk software reduces timely access to on-line records

- Manual updating procedures reduce database timeliness

- Access to the on-line facility file is currently limited to St. Louis regional office staff.

Each of these four problems is discussed in more detail below.

Due to centralized benefits processing for the Chapter 30 program, the VACO contracted with a private company to develop a centralized facility file that includes information on schools located in all 50 states. Information for this database is collected by the St. Louis Education Liaison Representative (ELR) from ELRs located at the remaining 57 regional offices. However, the ELRs at the different regional offices have developed their own style and format for completing the school approval forms. This lack of standardization among ELRs has led to variability in the content of school records in the centralized facility file and therefore reduced database integrity. Adjudicators using school data that is incomplete waste valuable time in contacting ELRs to gather needed information that should be in the on-line facility file.

In addition, the on-line facility file also lacks a single, distinct reference code for each facility. This indexing problem leads to time-consuming searching of the database by adjudicators and other database users in order to access the proper school record.

A third problem identified during the process assessment was the lengthy manual updating process used by the St. Louis ELR to maintain the facility file database. The updating process currently involves incorporating changes received in the mail from the ELRs at all other ROs and entering the new forms onto the optical disk database. While general guidelines exist regarding on-line file updates (Circular 22-85-6, Appendix 6), this guidance is not specific enough for ELRs to determine whether an occurrence is significant enough to warrant an on-line file update. Because of this, ELRs send a variety of minor to major changes and all are entered onto the database. From April to September of 1988, over 4,000 changes to the facility file were received and entered into both the hardcopy and on-line facility file. In addition, as other ROs may neglect to send needed information on a particular school, St. Louis RO staff is often required to contact the RO individually regarding a specific case. This is a time-consuming method due to these database problems.

A fourth problem with the centralized facility file is the inability for regional offices other than St. Louis to access either the hardcopy or on-line facility file. This lack of access currently affects the ability of other offices to assist in the updating of the facility file. With the upcoming regionalization of Chapter 30 benefits processing, this lack of access will become a more important impediment to effective Chapter 30 processing.

Circulars are used by all VBA regional offices to provide information on programs and procedures. The Booz, Allen study team identified two key problems with the use of circulars to disseminate information on Chapter 30 to the VA:

- Circulars are subject to a lengthy approval process that delays dissemination of information to the field
- Circulars are organized in such a way that impedes access to information.

These two issues are described in more detail below.

Currently, circulars are prepared by VACO and distributed to the field taking, on average, 62 days to prepare according to an analysis provided by VA staff. These circulars are then distributed through either electronic mail or the government mail system to the regional offices. Regional offices then file these circulars in notebooks in chronological order. Circulars that change previous circulars are sometimes used to update the database by the cut-and-paste method. Both the lengthy time to prepare and circulate these documents and the labor-intensive updating procedures are an inefficient use of VBA resources.

The organization of the circular hardcopy file also reduces the usefulness of this program tool. No table of contents or subject index is available for all circulars, although some circulars have a table of contents particular to that document only. Therefore, review of all information on one particular subject, such as Chapter 30 eligibility, is a timely and inefficient task.

The VBA procedural manual has not yet incorporated information on Chapter 30 program concepts or procedures. It is projected by the VA that this update will be completed by January of 1990.

(3) Lack Of Attention To Chapter 30 Orientation At Locations Other Than St. Louis Led To Program Inefficiencies

Results of the outcome evaluation, presented in Chapter III, revealed that the VA was generally effective in meeting their information dissemination objectives Chapter 30. The process assessment, focusing on areas where the VA could improve its effectiveness, found three program weaknesses that linked to problems with meeting several information dissemination objectives. The information dissemination objectives that this section focuses on are:

- The extent to which the VA provides information to veterans regarding application for Chapter 30 benefits
- The extent to which the VA provides information to veterans regarding changes in the Chapter 30 program
- Time required to provide information.

In order to efficiently start up and maintain ongoing operations of the Chapter 30 program, clear, easy-to-understand information on Chapter 30 program operations were required. Process assessment findings revealed that materials for two audiences of the Chapter 30 program were difficult to understand and led to a high volume of unnecessary inquiries. In addition, a complete lack of materials provided to veterans on changes in the Chapter 30 program was noted. These three problem areas that contributed to program inefficiencies include:

- Lack of attention to training for VA regional office staff to assist them in performing the required tasks
- Lack of consistent, clearly written, and easy-to-understand training materials for VA regional office staff to assist them in performing the day-to-day tasks required
- Lack of clearly written, easy-to-understand directions for veterans to assist them in completing applications and monthly certifications of attendance
- Lack of information provided to veterans on changes in the Chapter 30 program.

These four problem areas are discussed in more detail below.

Information from the outcome assessment showed that a high volume of inquiries from other regional office staff regarding Chapter 30 were being received at the St. Louis regional office. In addition, the majority of these inquiries were concerned with Chapter 30 information already present in the VACO circulars that are circulated VA-wide. Process assessment data collection efforts revealed that training materials for regional office staff consist only of the VACO circulars and that training for Chapter 30 at all regional offices other than St. Louis had a low priority. This matched with the perception that training for Chapter 30 at the regional offices was inconsistent held by central office, St. Louis regional office, and selected other regional office staff,

Results from the BAH regional office survey showed that only 2 out of 58 stations developed their own training materials for Chapter 30. The materials that had been developed, however, were fairly complete and well-organized. Other regional offices were using circulars to conduct Chapter 30 training sessions, if training was being held at all. This relatively scarce distribution of easy-to-understand training materials, along with a lack of attention to training on Chapter 30 led to an inconsistent, low-level of knowledge regarding the Chapter 30 program at the majority of the regional offices outside of St. Louis.

From these data, the Booz, Allen study team concluded that the lack of training and training materials for staff at the majority of regional offices other than St. Louis contributed to some of the identified program inefficiencies.

A third area identified as contributing to program inefficiency was the lack of easy-to-understand instructions for the veterans for completing original applications and monthly certifications. Data collected on the number and type of inquiries revealed that 7% percent of inquiries being received by regional office staff were from veterans questioning how to complete these forms. In addition, interviews with St. Louis staff revealed that effort was being expended by them to call veterans regarding confusing or inconsistent information on these forms.

A fourth and final area that contributed to program ineffectiveness was the extent of information on changes being provided to the veteran. Process assessment data collection revealed that information on Chapter 30 changes provided by the VA was available to the veteran only through information being provided by the VA to the regional office staff through the distribution of circulars.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents our conclusions and recommendations for improving the VA's administration of the All-Volunteer Force Education Assistance Program (Chapter 30). The conclusions address the adequacy of the VA's approach for processing Chapter 30 benefits and disseminating information on Chapter 30. The recommendations identify improvements in program components and steps to increase effectiveness of the VA's administration of Chapter 30 program.

1. WE BELIEVE THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM IS GENERALLY BEING ADMINISTERED EFFECTIVELY BY THE VA

Our overall conclusion is that the VA's current approach in administering the Chapter 30 program is generally appropriate. This conclusion is based on evaluation findings that showed that the VA has been successful in achieving benefits processing and information dissemination objectives for the Chapter 30 program. It is also based on our identification of program weaknesses, our understanding of program process problems related to those weaknesses, and steps that are being taken by the VA to address some of these weaknesses.

(1) While Not Fully Effective In Meeting Intended Objectives, The VA Met The Most Important Chapter 30 Objectives

Our evaluation showed that the VA was generally effective in meeting the Chapter 30 program objectives. Further examination of our findings revealed that the VA was most effective in meeting objectives essential to the basic functioning of the Chapter 30 program during the start-up phase of the program. These objectives, essential to program start-up operations, include the verification of the eligibility of veterans who apply for Chapter 30 benefits and the payment of benefits to eligible veterans. Areas of less effectiveness include monitoring of veterans to insure they remain eligible and disseminating information on Chapter 30 to veterans. This second set of objectives are essential to the long-term, efficient operations of the Chapter 30 program.

Both sets of objectives are essential to the long-term success of the Chapter 30 program. However, we believe that the successful verification of eligibility and benefit payments are the most essential elements of basic program operations. As the Chapter 30 program is defined as a veterans benefits program, accurate processing and payment of benefits are the most important activities. For the initial program start-up, it is most important to have these two objectives met in a highly effective manner. In this sense, this first set of objectives is the most important set of objectives defined.

The second set of objectives is more essential for long-term, effective administration of the Chapter 30 program. Monitoring of veterans to ensure they remain eligible is an activity critical to long-term success but not fundamental to basic program start-up operations. Dissemination of information to veterans on eligibility for, application to, and changes to the Chapter 30 program are also critical elements to the long-term success of the Chapter 30 program. However, while the VA could improve the way in which this second set of objectives is met, this did not preclude initial success for the start-up of the Chapter 30 program.

Based on this analysis, we believe that the early Chapter 30 program efforts led to initial success of the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program. However, it is essential that VA effort begin to focus on the second set of objectives discussed above in order to ensure long-term program success.

(2) The VA Is Preparing To Implement Important Changes That Will Improve Future Chapter 30 Program Effectiveness

Our evaluation of this newly-implemented program also focused on the ability of the VA to learn from its mistakes and improve program operations. We believe that the VA has made major strides in its improvement of program functioning.

We believe that the VA has learned many lessons since the Chapter 30 program began. Efforts have been made to refine many processes that were initially planned to improve Chapter 30 administration. In addition, many new initiatives to improve the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program have been planned to accommodate the projected growth of the program. These refinements and plans reflect positively on the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program.

Efforts made by the VA to refine Chapter 30 processing include:

- Improvements to benefits processing hardware and software at the St. Louis regional office to increase capacity and efficiency of the system

- Improvements to benefits processing procedures to incorporate legislative changes

- Improvements to program management through increased, although uncoordinated, efforts to monitor program activities.

We believe that these efforts reflect positively on the VA's administration of this program.

In addition, future changes are planned to further improve VA program operations. These planned changes, based on information gathered through studies of program operations and projections developed that indicate rapid expansion of program needs, include:

- Regionalization of the benefits processing to four regional offices

- Implementation of compliance surveys to monitor school and veteran reporting of enrollment.

These program plans reflect positively on the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program.

In addition, an on-line approval file is currently being tested through the Model Station program in the Philadelphia, PA regional office. The intent of this test project is to establish a facility file database on the Wang system. This database is intended to have update, inquiry, and report functions and will standardize facility records. In addition, the intent is for all regional offices to have access to this database.

A VBA-wide modernization program is also currently planned. This initiative will update existing VBA systems to improve delivery of VBA services. Integration of existing hardware, software, and automated databases will occur. In addition, this ADP initiative is intended to improve access to management, workload, and administrative information.

In addition, the Department of Defense is currently developing a statistical model to estimate Chapter 30 enrollment. Use of this model should assist the VA in developing improved budget and workload projections.

2. WE BELIEVE THAT SEVERAL ADDITIONAL REFINEMENTS NEED TO BE MADE TO THE CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM

Our study also identified process weaknesses that are currently reducing the potential effectiveness of this program. We have recommendations in three areas:

- Improvements in program management to better coordinate and plan program efforts
- Improvements in access to program data to increase program efficiency
- Improvements in program materials for veterans to increase program effectiveness.

These recommendations will assist the VA in fully achieving objectives for its administration of the Chapter 30 program. Each of these three sets of recommendations is presented in more detail in the following sections.

(1) Efforts Are Needed To Improve Management Of The Chapter 30 Program

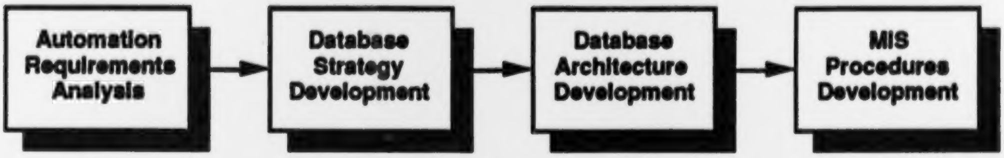
Our evaluation found that program inefficiencies resulted in part from weaknesses in VACO program management. We therefore recommend three improvements to the management of the Chapter 30 program:

- Develop a management information system to generate and utilize needed data for program planning, monitoring, and evaluation
- Increase effective VA-DOD communications and joint administration of the Chapter 30 program
- Development of a directory for regional offices that defines VACO Chapter 30 roles and responsibilities.

Each of these three improvements are discussed in more detail below.

During the Booz, Allen evaluation of the Chapter 30 program, the study team found that VA-specific goals or objectives for the Chapter 30 program were nonexistent and that information on Chapter 30 activities and expenditures was incomplete. In addition, VA program evaluation activities, while numerous and extensive, consisted of a series of ad hoc, short term studies focusing on particular areas of interest or concern. Therefore, our first recommendation to improve the VA's management of the Chapter 30 program is to develop a management information system (MIS) to routinely gather data for program planning, monitoring, and evaluation. This MIS should be developed using the four steps shown in Exhibit V-1.

Exhibit V-1
MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT


Automation Requirements Analysis
Database Strategy Development
Database Architecture Development
MIS Procedures Development

It is important that the MIS should be realistic in scope. Data requirements must be carefully weighed against resource considerations; a streamlined system collecting necessary data is the desired result. Development of an unwieldy, expensive system will be counterproductive to this recommendation. In addition, the MIS should collect information from both central office and regional offices and should include information on benefits processing and information dissemination. The VBA modernization initiative may impact this recommendation.

Evaluation findings also identified several areas of program weakness in benefits processing and information dissemination that were linked to the joint VA-DOD program administration. These problem areas, discussed in detail in Chapters III and IV, included:

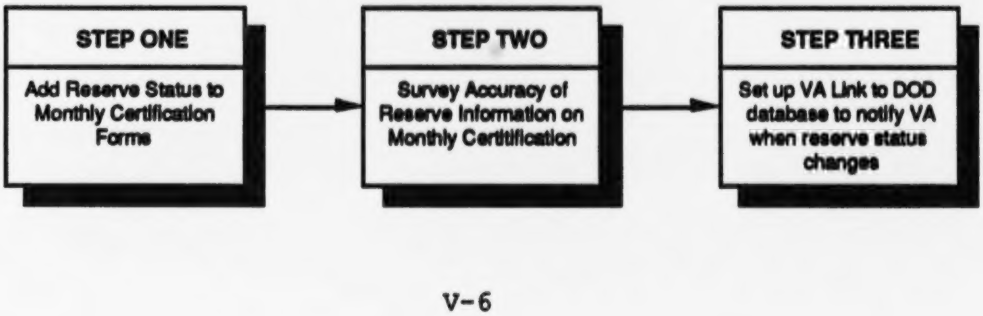
- Inaccuracies in DMDC database
- Lack of monitoring of veteran reserve status
- Inefficiencies in responding to veteran inquiries regarding kicker amounts that varied from veteran expectations
- Ineffectiveness in dissemination of information to veterans regarding application for Chapter 30 benefits.

Our second recommendation to improve VACO management of the Chapter 30 program is to increase effective VA-DOD communications regarding the joint administration of this program. While interviews with program officials at the VA revealed that VA-DOD communications did occur on a regular basis, we believe that increased emphasis needs to be placed on resolving these four program problem areas during these VA-DOD meetings. This increased emphasis should focus on identifying viable and realistic solutions to the four areas identified above. Further detail on our recommendations for these four areas is presented below.

DMDC database inaccuracies and inconsistencies are currently being identified by St. Louis regional office adjudication division during claims processing. Errors are recorded, compiled weekly, and sent to the DOD for resolution. However, resolution of these errors is extremely time-consuming; often veterans' claims are delayed in processing for several months due to these DMDC inaccuracies. As the Chapter 30 program increases in size, this problem, while currently insignificant, will become a major program weakness. By focusing VA-DOD effort now to identify an action plan to both improve VA-DOD problem resolution procedures (a short-term goal) and improve the accuracy of the DMDC database (long-term goal), major program processing problems will be avoided.

A second area in which VA-DOD communications needs to focus concerns the monitoring of veteran reserve status. As discussed in Chapter III, veterans who are eligible for the Chapter 30 program under the "2 by 4" program must maintain their reserve status for four years following two years of active service. If the four years of reserve duty are not satisfactorily completed, the veteran is not eligible for the full Chapter 30 benefits. However, there is no monitoring of reserve status by the VA to date. As selected reservists are anticipated to participate in increasing numbers in the Chapter 30 program, this benefits processing problem could eventually lead to overpayments for the Chapter 30 program. Therefore, we recommend that VA-DOD communications focus on developing a system for monitoring reserve status. The development of this monitoring system should contain three steps as shown in Exhibit V-2 below.

Exhibit V-2
DEVELOPMENT OF RESERVE STATUS
MONITORING SYSTEM


STEP ONE
Add Reserve Status to Monthly Certification Forms
STEP TWO
Survey Accuracy of Reserve Information on Monthly Certification
STEP THREE
Set up VA Link to DOD database to notify VA when reserve status changes

Through development of this monitoring system, VA effectiveness in accurately paying benefits will be greatly increased.

We also recommend that VA-DOD efforts should focus on better communications to the active serviceperson and the veteran regarding DOD kicker amounts. During our evaluation, we identified in Chapter III that veterans' expectations regarding their DOD kicker amounts were not always met due to DOD reduction in force and other DOD policies. The St. Louis regional office is currently responding to the large volume of inquiries regarding this issue by referring the veteran to the DOD while other regional offices have reported an inability to respond to these inquiries. We believe that by focusing VA-DOD communications on this problem to identify VA procedures for responding to these inquiries (short-term action) and DOD procedures for better communicating to the separatees regarding their anticipated kicker amounts (long-term action), this program inefficiency will be reduced.

We also recommend that VA-DOD communications focus on provision of information to veterans regarding Chapter 30 applications. During our evaluation, we found that little Chapter 30-specific information was being provided to eligible veterans. In addition, process assessment revealed that this was due to two problems:

- Lack of information with which to locate Chapter 30 eligible veterans
- Lack of resources to develop and print Chapter 30 specific publications.

By focusing VA-DOD efforts in this area, these two problems could be resolved. The DOD needs to provide the VA with information regarding Chapter 30-eligible veterans so that the VA has the ability to directly access these potential trainees. In addition, VA-DOD resources could be pooled to develop consistent, comprehensive publications on the Chapter 30 program for dissemination to servicepersons and veterans. Further recommendations to develop Chapter 30-specific materials to distribute to these veterans are presented later in this chapter.

Process assessment findings also revealed that a lack of clearly defined programmatic lines of responsibility in VACO VBA were responsible in part for identified program inefficiencies. While VACO VBA staff have clearly defined administrative lines of responsibility, programs such as Chapter 30 cross these administrative lines. Interviews with regional office staff revealed that inefficiencies occurred when attempting to contact the correct VACO program official for a particular Chapter 30-specific question. Our second recommendation, therefore, is that the VA develop a directory for regional office distribution that identifies roles and responsibilities for Chapter 30 for VACO staff. This directory should clearly identify specific roles and responsibilities down to the office level. While developing this directory, care should be taken to reduce or eliminate any overlap of responsibilities. In addition, responsibilities that are not currently assigned to any particular office should be identified and assigned. Annual review of this directory should also occur to ensure that the initial assignments remain appropriate.

(2) Efforts Are Needed To Develop Two Automated Databases

Our evaluation also found that program inefficiencies resulted in part from lack of access to program data. We recommend the development of two automated databases to improve the efficiency of the Chapter 30 program:

- Develop an on-line, interactive facility database accessible to all regional offices
- Develop an automated database for Chapter 30 circulars and other procedural information.

Four steps, as shown in previously in Exhibit V-1, are required to develop these automated databases. First, a requirements analysis should be performed that determines the needs of the potential users. Second, a database strategy should be developed that identifies the database concept. Third, a database architecture should be designed. Finally, procedures for using these databases should be developed. Specific discussion on the two automated databases recommended for development are discussed in more detail below.

Program inefficiencies in benefits processing were identified in our evaluation. Subsequent process assessment findings revealed that problems with access to comprehensive, current information on VA-approved schools were in part responsible for the benefit processing inefficiencies.

Our first recommendation to improve program operations is the development of an on-line, interactive facility database. This automated database should be available to all regional offices that receive and process information on VA-approved academic facilities. In addition, regional office education liaison representatives should have limited interactive access to this file in order to update information on facilities within their jurisdiction. Standardized updating procedures should be developed by VACO. The development of this database will have two effects:

- Access to timely, accurate information on facilities will improve through development and implementation of updating procedures
- Access to consistent information on facilities will improve through standardization of database records.

The development of these two databases will result in improved program effectiveness. Timeliness of benefits processing will improve as Chapter 30 adjudicators will no longer need to delay claims due to lack of access to current facility file data. In addition, program inefficiencies related to the high level of resources required to maintain duplicate facility records in the St. Louis office regarding facilities will be eliminated. The Model Station program in Philadelphia, PA may offer a solution to this problem through their development of an on-line approval file.

Our second recommendation to improve program operations is to develop an automated database for circulars and other VA documents containing Chapter 30-specific information. During our evaluation, the Booz, Allen study team identified that lack of access to current information by regional office staff led to program ineffectiveness. Process assessment findings revealed two program problem areas that caused this program weakness:

- Lack of convenient updating procedures for and indexing of VBA circulars on Chapter 30
- Lack of timely publication of circulars.

Each of these two problem areas is explained further below.

Procedural and general information on Chapter 30 published by the VA for regional office staff is in the form of circulars and procedural manuals. The procedural manual containing information on Chapter 30 and a subject index is currently being prepared and, according to VACO interview data, will be available for

VA-wide distribution by January 1990. Approximately six circulars with numerous appendices that contain information on Chapter 30 along with other VA education programs have been published to date.

Interviews with regional office staff revealed that these circulars were cumbersome and difficult to use. Both updating and indexing difficulties were cited as primary problems with this database. Most staff maintain the circulars in a chronologically-organized three-ring binder. When a circular is modified, the file is updated by either replacing the corrected page, marking the circular, or cutting and pasting a new section or paragraph onto the old circular. This method is very time-consuming and labor-intensive. While a comprehensive list of circulars is prepared and distributed quarterly, the lack of a comprehensive table of contents or subject index for the entire collection of circulars contributes to the difficulty in using this database. As the database is organized chronologically instead of by subject area, this lack of index information makes it extremely difficult to easily locate specific information on a Chapter 30 topic area.

These problems resulted in difficulty accessing current information on Chapter 30 procedures. A recent VACO study showed that staff in regional offices other than St. Louis provided inconsistent responses to requests for information on Chapter 30. In addition, interviews with St. Louis staff revealed that many inquiries received by St. Louis from the other regional offices concerned information contained in the circulars available to these regional office staff.

Circulars provide information to VBA Chapter 30 staff in the St. Louis regional office regarding benefits processing procedures. These circulars provide consistent instructions to VBA staff regarding Chapter 30 benefits processing. However, interviews with these staff in St. Louis revealed that circulars providing needed procedural instructions were often finalized several months after the procedures were actually needed. For example, the circulars containing information on processing claims for veterans newly eligible for Chapter 30 benefits under the recent legislative changes in November of 1988 were drafted and sent to St. Louis in January of 1989 and the final version was recently published on March 23, 1989. Interviews at St. Louis revealed that St. Louis staff developed their own interim procedures in order to process these benefits in a timely way. While no serious problems resulted from this process to date, regionalization of claims processing to four regional offices will compound any potential processing problems resulting from lack of timely procedural instructions from Central Office.

Due to these problems with circulars, we recommend creation of an automated database to be maintained by VACO containing information currently in the circulars. This database, available to all regional offices, should be capable of providing data by subject area, date, and other variables. In addition, staff resources at the regional offices for updating this database will be eliminated. While staff resources will be required at VACO to maintain the database, only one person will be updating the database instead of 58 people at 58 regional offices. Timeliness should improve as draft circulars can be placed on the database (clearly marked as draft) to provide interim instructions regarding Chapter 30 processing procedures while the final circular is awaiting approval.

(3) Improvements Are Required For Chapter 30 Program Materials

Finally, our evaluation found that program inefficiencies resulted in part from weaknesses in available Chapter 30 materials. We recommend two improvements/additions to the VA's materials for the Chapter 30 program:

- Development of easy-to-understand instructions for Chapter 30 application and monthly certification materials
- Development of general materials for veterans on Chapter 30 eligibility, application, and information sources.

These two improvements are discussed in detail in the following section.

The evaluation findings showed that excessive VA effort was being expended in responding to inquiries concerning completion of Chapter 30 applications and monthly certification forms. In addition, the delayed time cycle for the Chapter 30 payments were the source of inquiries regarding the location of these benefit checks. We recommend that simple, easy-to-understand instructions on Chapter 30 applications and monthly certification forms should be added to these forms. The instructions should explain:

- How to complete the form
- The delayed monthly payment cycle.

In addition, monthly certification forms should stress to the veteran that the form should be completed as soon as possible following receipt in order to receive the benefit check in a more timely manner.

We believe that this recommendation will increase program effectiveness in these areas.

The study also identified that program effectiveness could be increased by focusing more VA effort on information dissemination on Chapter 30. We recommend that Chapter 30-specific materials should be prepared that present general information on the current legislation, eligibility requirements, application information, the delayed payment cycle, and other relevant data. These materials should be proactively distributed as appropriate. Suggestions include:

- Developing a mailing list of eligible veterans and distributing Chapter 30 information through the VADS system
- Using the monthly certification mailing to provide current information to active trainees
- Developing and distributing a news release regarding changes to the Chapter 30 program.

We believe that this recommendation will improve the VA's ability to meet the information dissemination objectives in a more effective manner.

This section discussed three sets of recommendations for improving effectiveness of the Chapter 30 program. These recommendations involved program management, program data, and program materials.

3. THESE CHANGES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED PRIOR TO PROJECTED PROGRAM EXPANSION

In this chapter, we have described three sets of recommendations. These recommendations, dealing with program management, program operations, and program materials, are summarized in Exhibit V-3.

Exhibit V-3
SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 30 RECOMMENDATIONS

PROGRAM AREA	RECOMMENDATION
PROGRAM MANAGEMENT	• Development of a Chapter 30-specific Management Information System • Increase VA-DOD communications • Development of a directory for regional offices defining VACO Chapter 30 roles and responsibilities
PROGRAM OPERATIONS	• Development of an on-line, interactive facility database • Development of an automated database for Chapter 30 circulars and other procedural information
PROGRAM MATERIALS	• Development of easy-to-understand materials for Chapter 30 application and monthly certification materials • Development of general materials for veterans on Chapter 30 eligibility, application, and information sources.

These recommendations should be implemented in context of the VBA modernization initiative. In addition, the recommendations should be implemented as soon as possible. These two issues are briefly explained below.

(1) Recommendations Should Be Implemented In Context With The VBA Modernization Initiative

As mentioned previously in this chapter, VBA is currently engaged in a modernization program to update existing ADP technologies. A major result of this program is the improvement of management, workload, and administrative information. Potential systems integration efforts will also be examined.

We believe that the recommendations to the Chapter 30 program that involve management information systems development and automated database systems development may be influenced by modernization plans. It is therefore important that actions taken to implement Booz, Allen recommendations be in concert with the VBA modernization initiative.

(2) Recommendations Should Be Implemented Immediately

Data from VACO show that the VA is administering Chapter 30 benefits to approximately 26,000 trainees in FY89. However, this program is projected to increase almost ten-fold to a anticipated 224,000 trainees in 1994.

It is with this program growth in mind that Booz, Allen recommends that the VA implement the above recommendations by FY90. Problems that appear minor at this time will become tremendous program burdens in the future. The VA has an opportunity at this time to look forward and make program adjustments to assure that the Chapter 30 program is fully effective in meeting its VA objectives.

APPENDIX A

REGIONAL OFFICE SURVEY RESULTS

APPENDIX A
Regional Office Survey Results

Division/Office: **DIRECTOR**

D-1. How many veterans in your jurisdiction are currently receiving Chapter 30 benefits?

Response	Frequency	Percent
0-50	13	30%
51-100	7	17%
101-150	10	23%
151 and over	13	30%
Total	43	100%
No response	12	

D-2. In your regional office, does the Director's Office conduct any Chapter 30 activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	8	15%
No	46	85%
Total	54	100%
No response	3	

D-3 Please briefly describe the Director's Office Chapter 30 activities below.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Question skipped	46	82%
Reviews congressional inquiries	7	12%
Conducts liaison and outreach activities	3	6%
Total	56	100%

D-4. What are the estimated hours per week spent by the Director's Office on these activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
1 to 5	8	100%
6 to 10	0	0%
11 to 15	0	0%
16 to 20	0	0%
21 or more	0	0%
Total	8	100%
No response	49	

Specify the average grade level of the employees in the Director's Office who spent the above hours on Chapter 30 activities. Grade 11 (n=8)

D-5 In your opinion, what are the major strengths of the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Centralized processing of benefits	36	63%
Target screens give ROs access to data in veteran's master file	7	12%
Strengths of the program cannot be determine yet because of the newness of program	4	7%
Other comments	9	16%
Total	47	
No response	5	

D-6 In your opinion, what are the major weaknesses of the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Centralized of the benefits processing is less effective causing delays in processing	35	61%
The service data on the veteran is not complete on the Target screen	13	23%
Staff person is not involved enough with Chapter 30 processing to determine its weaknesses	8	14%
Other comments	5	9%
Total	61	
No response	1	

D-7 In your opinion, how could the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program be improved?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Benefits processing should be decentralized	26	46%
Benefits processing should be improved	18	32%
Make the Target database on-line at all ROs	11	19%
Training materials need to be more detailed	4	7%
Other comments	4	0%
Total	63	
No response	6	

Division/Office: **ADJUDICATION**

A-1. Does the Adjudication Division in your regional office conduct any Chapter 30 activities such as ratings, responding to written inquiries, training, etc.?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	55	100%
No	0	0%
Total	55	100%
No response	2	

A-2. Please describe the Adjudication Division's Chapter 30 activities below.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Check Rating Board decision on type of discharge	55	96%
Send claims and documents to St. Louis	32	56%
Log in all education documents received	18	32%
Respond to inquiries	11	19%
Other comments	7	12%
Conduct training for Staff on Chapter 30	1	2%
Total	124	
No response	1	

A-3. What are the estimated hours per week spent by the entire Adjudication Division staff on these activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
1 to 5	48	87%
6 to 10	5	9%
11 to 15	1	2%
16 to 20	1	2%
21 or more	0	0%
Total	55	100%
No response	2	

Specify the average grade level of the employees in Adjudication who spent the above hours on Chapter 30 activities. Average Grade 10.7

A-4. Does the Adjudication division have Chapter 30-specific training for the Adjudication staff?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	31	56%
No	24	44%
Total	55	100%
No response	2	

A-5. Approximately how many hours per month are spent on the Chapter 30-specific training?

Response	Frequency	Percent
1-5	30	97%
6-10	1	3%
More than 11	0	0%
Total	31	100%
No response	26	

A-6. What types of Chapter 30-specific training materials does the Adjudication division use?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Training manuals	3	10%
Circulars	32	97%
Other	5	16%
Total Responses	38	100%
No response	24	

Division/Office: **ADMINISTRATION**

AD-1. What is the average number per week of Chapter 30 claims forwarded by your regional office to the St. Louis regional office for processing?

Response	Frequency	Percent
0-5	33	64%
6-10	7	14%
11-20	7	14%
21 and over	4	8%
Total	51	100%
No response	6	

AD-2. What are the estimated hours per week spent by the Administrative Division on these activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
1 to 5	45	98%
6 to 10	0	0%
11 to 15	0	0%
16 to 20	0	0%
21 or more	1	2%
Total	46	100%
No response	11	

Specify the average grade level of the employees in Administration who spent the above hours on Chapter 30 activities. Average Grade 3.9

AD-3. Does administrative staff training include information on how to recognize Chapter 30 applications?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	23	41%
No	32	59%
Total	55	100%
No response	2	

AD-4. Does administrative staff training include information on handling of Chapter 30 applications?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	22	40%
No	32	60%
Total	54	100%
No response	3	

Division/Office: **VETERANS SERVICES**

VSD-1. Does the Veterans Services Division conduct any Chapter 30 activities such as responding to written or telephone inquiries?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	56	100%
No	0	0%
Total	56	100%
No response	1	

VSD-2. Please describe the Veterans Services Division's Chapter 30 activities below.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Answers inquiries (non-specified)	23	40%
Answers inquiries by telephone	37	65%
Answers written inquiries	22	38%
Answers inquiries concerning status of claim	27	47%
Assists the veteran in preparation of claim	22	38%
Conducts training or liaison activities	14	24%
Calls St. Louis for assistance	14	24%
Total	159	

VSD-3. What are the estimated hours per week spent by the Veterans Services Division on these activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
1 to 5	25	44%
6 to 10	16	29%
11 to 15	6	11%
16 to 20	5	9%
21 or more	4	7%
Total	56	100%

No response 1

Specify the average grade level of the employees in VSD who spent the above hours on Chapter 30 activities. Average Grade 9.1

VSD-4a. Has your division ever contacted an academic institution for information on Chapter 30?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	38	67%
No	18	33%
Total	55	100%

No response 1

VSD-4b. Specify the types of information requested from an academic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Confirmation that the trainee is enrolled	37	65%
Changes in attendance status	20	35%
Information on course/credit loads	7	12%
Other comments	3	5%
Total	67	
No response	19	

VSD-5a. Describe the other types of requests received on the Chapter 30 program.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Information on the status of the benefit claim	43	75%
Information on the trainee's eligibility	17	30%
Information on the certification of attendance process	8	14%
Other comments	5	9%
Total	73	
No response	19	

VSD-5b. Please complete the chart below on requests for information received by your regional office.

Type of Request	Average No. Received Weekly	Average Time To Process (minutes)
All Requests for Information	3530	
a. Written	163.4	77.9
b. Telephone	2814.8	9.0
c. Personal Interview	287.3	22.0

Type of Request	Average No. Received Weekly	Average Time To Process (minutes)
Total **Chapter 30** Requests	27.0	
a. Written	2.6	85.4
b. Telephone	53.4	7.6
c. Personal Interview	6.6	20.0

VSD-5b. Please complete the chart below on requests for information received by your regional office (cont'd.)

Type of Request	Average No. Received Weekly	Average Time To Process (minutes)
CHAPTER 30 REQUESTS BY SUBJECT AREA:		
Request for Chapter 30 Application	8.1	6.7
Request for Chapter 30-related telephone number	1.6	2.1
Request for general information about Chapter 30 program	42.1	11.3
Other Chapter 30 Requests (if zero, skip to VSD-6)	13.1	10.3

VSD-6. Has your division ever contacted St. Louis Regional Office for more information needed to respond to a Chapter 30 request for information?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	53	95%
No	3	5%
Total	56	100%
No response	1	

VSD-7. How many times has your division contacted St. Louis Regional Office to obtain information needed to respond to a request for information?

63.0	(# times in the last six months)
111.7	(# times in the last year)

VSD-8. Please specify the number of times your office has requested the following information from St. Louis Regional Office in order to answer Chapter 30 inquiries.

Average Number	Type of Information
0.1	Information on a School Approval Code
0.2	Information on an approved course
0.4	Information on approved full-time hours
5.4	Information on eligibility requirements
8.9	Information on date that a Chapter 30 certification was mailed
23.4	Information on date a Chapter 30 award was approved
47.8	Other information on Chapter 30 claim status
13.0	Other

VSD-9. Describe the types of inquiries the division responds to without need to contact the St. Louis RO.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Inquiries on the status of a claim	66	100%
Information on eligibility requirements	54	95%
Department of Defense kicker amount information	10	17%
School approval code	5	9%
Processing the monthly certification	4	
Total	139	
No response	1	

VSD-10. Has your office ever forwarded a written inquiry to St. Louis for response directly to the inquirer?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	22%
No	44	78%
Total	56	100%
No response	1	

VSD-11. Have any of the forwarded letters specified in Question VSD-10 ever been returned from St. Louis Regional Office for your office to answer?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	13%
No	14	87%
Total	16	100%
No response	41	

VSD-12. Please rate the St. Louis Regional Office's performance in responding to your division's requests for Chapter 30 information.

Timeliness of St. Louis in responding to requests for information has been:

Response	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	19	37%
Good	24	46%
Satisfactory	10	17%
Poor	0	0%
Total	16	100%
No response	4	

Please state reason your for the above rating of St. Louis' timeliness in responding to requests for information.

Response	Frequency	Percent
The service is timely	38	66%
There has been no negative feedback	10	17%
The response time is long	5	9%
Total	53	
No response	5	

Accuracy of information received from St. Louis has been:

Response	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	25	48%
Good	22	42%
Satisfactory	5	8%
Poor	1	2%
Total	53	100%
No response	4	

VSD-12. Please state your reason for the above rating on the accuracy of information from St. Louis.

Response	Frequency	Percent
The information is accurate and good	35	79%
The information is inaccurate	3	7%
Other comments	6	14%
Total	44	100%
No response	2	

VSD-13. Does your division train employees specifically on Chapter 30?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	53	95%
No	3	5%
Total	56	100%
No response	1	

VSD-14. On average, how many hours of training per month are spent on Chapter 30?

3.5 (average hours of training per month)

VSD-15a. What types of training materials are used for the Chapter 30 training?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Circulars	53	96%
Videotapes	1	2%
Training Materials	6	12%
Other	26	48%
Total	86	100%
No response	2	

VSD-15b. What types of training materials are used for Chapter 30 training other than circulars videotapes, training manuals.

Response	Frequency	Percent
RO developed training materials	13	50%
Target screens	8	31%
CO developed training materials	5	19%
Total	26	100%
No response	27	

VSD-16. Has your regional office developed any Chapter 30-specific training materials?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	16	28%
No	38	72%
Total	54	100%
No response	3	

VSD-17. Please briefly describe the types of information requested by St. Louis.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Course approval information	14	31%
School approval information	25	57%
Other comments	6	13%
Total	45	101%
No response	20	

VSD-18. Other comments on the Chapter 30 Program.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Improvements are needed to certification processing	15	26%
ROs need universal access to all Target database service information	14	24%
The DMDC screen has inaccurate data on the trainee	8	14%
Improve the inquiry response service by St. Louis	3	5%
Other comments	12	21%
Total	52	
No response	21	

Division/Office: **VETERANS SERVICES; Education Liaison Representative(s) only**

ELR-1. As the Education Liaison Representative for your regional office, do you spend any time conducting Chapter 30-specific activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	53	98%
No	1	2%
Total	54	100%
No response	3	

ELR-2. Describe Chapter 30 activities of the Education Liaison Representative.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Information for claims processing is sent to St. Louis	32	56%
Training/information is provided to school certifying officials and the VBCs	32	56%
Response to inquiries	31	54%
Conduct liaison/outreach activities on Chapter 30	22	38%
Other comments	5	9%
Total	122	
No response	1	

ELR-3. What percent of your time is spent on Chapter 30-specific activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
1 to 10%	41	79%
11 to 25%	11	19%
26 to 50%	1	2%
51 to 75%	0	0%
76 to 100%	0	0%
Total	53	100%
No response	4	

ELR-4. Have you developed any Chapter 30-specific information to be sent to certified academic institutions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	30	55%
No	24	45%
Total	54	100%
No response	3	

ELR-5. Write any other comments regarding the VA's administration of the Chapter 30 program.

Response	Frequency	Percent
There are problems with processing claims	20	35%
Circulars and manuals on Chapter 30 are not well written or designed	7	12%
The program need compliance surveys to monitor the accuracy of school attendance	5	9%
The ROs have insufficient data on veterans	5	9%
Other comments	7	12%
Total	28	
No response	18	

Division/Office: **FINANCE**

F-1. Does the Finance Division in your regional office conduct any Chapter 30 activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	34	62%
No	20	38%
Total	54	100%
No response	3	

F-2. What are the estimated hours per week spent by the Finance Division on these activities?

Response	Frequency	Percent
1 to 5	34	100%
6 to 10	0	0%
11 to 15	0	0%
16 to 20	0	0%
21 or more	0	0%
Total	34	100%
No response	23	

Specify the average grade level of the employees in the Finance Division who spent the above hours on Chapter 30 activities. Grade 6 (n=32)

F-3. Please briefly describe the Finance Division's Chapter 30 activities.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Process work study payments and contracts	20	35%
Respond to nonreceipt of payment and eligibility	14	24%
Process waivers and compromises	13	23%
Process monthly certifications of attendance	11	19%
Other comments	3	5%
Total	61	
No response	18	

APPENDIX B

CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM EVALUATION MANAGEMENT AND STAFF INTERVIEWS

APPENDIX B
CHAPTER 30 PROGRAM EVALUATION
MANAGEMENT AND STAFF INTERVIEWS

ST. LOUIS REGIONAL OFFICE (RO)

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
- Director
- Management Analyst
- Assistant Director

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION
- Administrative Officer
- Assistant Division Chief
- Lead Program Clerk
- Program Clerk

SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION
- Supervisory Program Analyst

ADJUDICATION DIVISION
- Adjudication Officer
- Section Chief
- Senior Claims Examiner
- Claims Examiner

VETERAN SERVICES DIVISION
- VSD Officer
- Education Liaison Representative
- Supervisor Telephone Unit
- Veterans Benefits Counselor

FINANCE DIVISION
- Finance Officer
- Assistant Finance Officer
- Chief Centralized Processing
- Fiscal Accountant Clerk

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CENTRAL OFFICE (VACO)

OFFICE OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
- Fiscal Systems:
    - Benefits Payment Policy Division Chief
    - Benefits Payment Policy Staff

ASSOCIATE DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
- Rayburn House Office Building:
    - Chief House Liaison Staff

CHIEF BENEFITS DIRECTOR
- General Operating Expense Division Acting Chief

DEPUTY CBD FOR FIELD OPERATIONS
- Deputy Chief Benefits Director
- Associate Director
- Field Liaison and Budget Staff Chief

DEPUTY CBD FOR ADP SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT
- Deputy Chief Benefits Director
- CP&E Systems Division Staff

DEPUTY CBD FOR PROGRAM MANAGEMENT
- Deputy Chief Benefits Director
- Deputy Chief Benefits Director Special Assistant
- Planning and Analysis Staff Assistant Director
- Field Review Staff Director
- Administrative Systems Division Chief:
  - Management Analysts

COMPENSATION AND PENSION SERVICE
- Policy and Planning
  - Assistant Director

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EDUCATION SERVICE
- Director
- Deputy Director
- Education Operations:
  - Field Operations Chief
  - Central Office Operations Chief
- Education Procedures and Systems:
  - Assistant Director
  - Systems Staff Chief
  - Procedures Staff Chief
- Education Policy and Program Administration:
  - Policy Staff Chief
  - Program Administration Staff Chief
  - Education Advisor

VETERAN ASSISTANCE SERVICE
- Director
- Field Operation:
  - Acting Assistant Director
- Program Management:
  - Assistant Director

In addition, interviews were conducted with selected representatives from VBA regional offices in St. Petersburg, FL; San Francisco, CA; Waco, TX; Nashville, TN; and Seattle, WA.

APPENDIX C

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX C
BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Department of Veterans Benefits (DVB), U.S. Veterans Administration, Chapter 30 Adjudication Procedure (DVB Circular 22-85-6, Appendix A Revised), Washington, DC: DVB, 1987.

2. Department of Veterans Benefits (DVB), U.S. Veterans Administration, Chapter 30 - Montgomery GI Bill Active Duty Educational Assistance Program (DVB Circular 22-85-6, Revised), Washington, DC: DVB, 1987.

3. Department of Veterans Benefits (DVB), Veterans Administration, Chapter 30 - New G.I. Bill Active Duty Educational Assistance Program (DVB Circular 22-85-6, Change 1), Washington, DC: DVB, 1986.

4. Department of Veterans Benefits (DVB), Veterans Administration, Chapter 30 Regional Office Fiscal Processing (DVB Circular 22-85-6, Appendix I), Washington, DC: DVB, 1988.

5. Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Changes to Education and Employment Benefits Provided by PL 100-689 (VBA Circular 20-89), Washington , DC: VBA, 1989.

6. Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Instructions for the St. Louis Adjudication Division (VBA Circular 20-89, Appendix), Washington, DC: VBA, 1989.

7. Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center, Annual Training Seminar for Certifying Official of institutions of Higher Learning (Training Manual), Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center, 1988.

8. Scoggin, Ron, Veterans Administration Certifying Officials Workshop, November 14 and 15, 1988 (Training Manual), St. Petersburg, FL, St. Petersburg Regional Office, 1988.

9. U.S. Department of Defense, Department of Defense Authorization Act, 1985 (Public Law 98-525, October 19, 1984), Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985, pp. 2553-2555.

10. U.S. House of Representatives and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs, 100th Congress, 2nd Session, Report to Assess Veterans Education Policy (House Committee Print No. 17), Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988.

11. U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), First Annual Report to Congress on the Montgomery G.I. Bill (Chapter 30, Title 38, USC), Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987.

12. U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), Montgomery G.I. Bill - Second Annual Report to Congress, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989.

13. U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), Synopsis of Veterans Administration Folderless File Prototype System, Washington, DC: VA, 1988.

14. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Benefits Administration, *White Paper on Impact of Chapter 30 Processing*, Washington, DC: VA, 1989.

15. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), *Video Script* (September 21, 1988), St. Louis, MO: VA, 1988.

16. U.S. Department Of Veteran Affairs (VA), *Veteran Discharge System (VADS) Package*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989.

17. U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), *White Paper on Congressional Correspondence*, Washington, DC: VA, 1988.